

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM  
SPECTRUM DISORDER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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## DECLARATION

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### PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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SIGNATURE

January 2020

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DATE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Limited research has been conducted about the involvement of parents in the education of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in South Africa. The main aim of this study was to explore how involved parents and teachers are in the education of learners with ASD in a special educational needs school in Emalahleni. The research investigation was rooted in Epstein's model for parental involvement. Situated in the interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative approach. Data were collected through interviews, document analysis and observations with four parents and four teachers in a special educational needs school in Emalahleni, accommodating learners with ASD. Only parents of learners with ASD and teachers working with children with ASD were included in the study. The findings of the study highlight the importance of parental involvement, benefits and barriers that are associated with parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. The researcher also reported on ways in which parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced. The recommendations concluded that in order to promote academic success, the teachers and the parents need to work together. Lastly, the data obtained in this study can be used as a baseline for future research on the parental involvement in South Africa. Future research is needed in order to determine the barriers and benefits of parental involvement in the education of learners with ASD in South Africa.

**KEY TERMS:** autism spectrum disorder, education, learners, parental involvement, parents, school, special educational needs, teachers.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

The following abbreviations were used in the thesis:

ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
ASA	Autism South Africa
DoE	Department of Education
HICs	High-income countries
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LICs	Low-income countries
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SGB	School governing body
SIAS	Screening, identification, assessment and support
SNAP	Special needs adapted programme
UNISA	University of South Africa

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the background, the theoretical framework, the problem statement and rationale of the study, the research questions, the research methodology, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, the definition of key concepts and the chapter outline.

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND**

This study investigates parents' and teachers' involvement in the education of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in a special educational needs school in Emalahleni in the Mpumalanga Province.

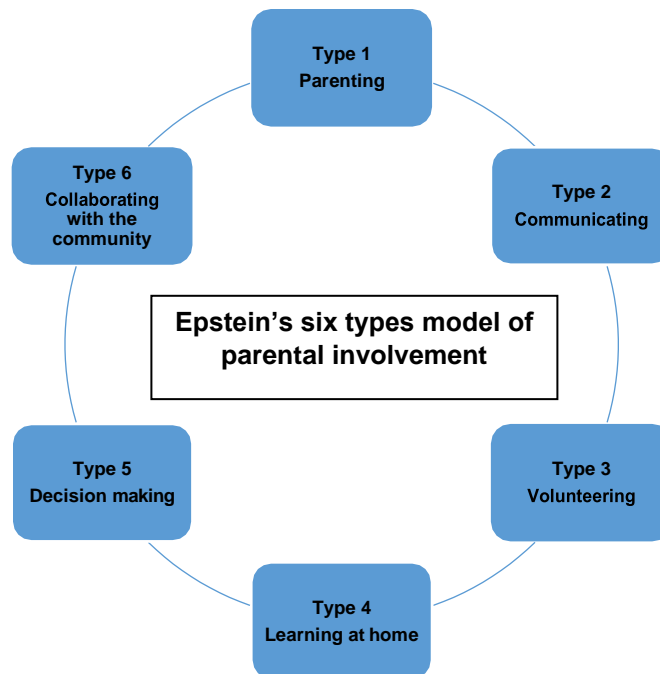
Parents and teachers have an important role to play in the education of children experiencing barriers to learning, such as ASD (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Parents and teachers often take up separate, isolated roles (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Parents usually focus on moral, cultural, religious education and supporting their child's needs, whereas the teacher takes responsibility for academic orientated topics and development (Mncube, 2009). The research found that there are several benefits if parents and teachers are involved in their child's education (Jeynes, 2011; Sheridan, Ryoo, Garbacz, Kunz & Chumney, 2013). The benefits include improved academic outcomes, better school attendance and homework completion rates, improved self-esteem, and higher teacher morale (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). However, there are several factors that might influence the parents' and teachers' involvement in the education of children with ASD (Benson, Karlof & Siperstein, 2008). Parents of children with ASD face increased challenges with regard to balancing work and family commitments, and often have negative attitudes or perceptions regarding parental involvement (Benson et al., 2008). Furthermore, teachers have also indicated that parents of children with ASD are less involved in school activities such as volunteering in their child's classroom, communicating with teachers and attending school meetings (Hoover-Dempsey et al.,

2005). This may also be because the school does not provide sufficient opportunities, support and encouragement for parents to explore how involved parents and teachers are in the education of children with ASD.

An in-depth literature review of parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement, parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in developing and developed countries, factors that influence parental involvement, benefits of parental involvement, the role of parents and teachers in the education of children with ASD and the strategies to enhance parental involvement will be given in Chapter 2.

### **1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The current study was conducted through the lens of Epstein's parental involvement model (Epstein, 1994). Epstein's theory (1994) describes the dynamics of family and school relationships and the forces that have an influence. The theory of overlapping spheres is regarded as pivotal in the field of family-school partnerships and also explains the internal and external factors that may influence these spheres as well as the six parent involvement types that can assist when planning, implementing and reviewing parents' participation (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). The six types of parental involvement model include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1994) and are presented visually in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1: Epstein's six types of parental involvement**

### **Epstein's six types of parental involvement model**

Epstein's six types of parental involvement model, as a theoretical framework, provides a foundation for this study as it explains possible partnerships between the home and the school environment. The six types of parental involvement model will now be discussed in more detail, starting at type 1.

- **Type 1: Parenting**

Parents should support their children's education by providing a healthy home environment (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Furthermore, it is important for teachers to assist parents by arranging parenting workshops; helping families find the needed support; helping families create positive home environments; and doing possible home visits when children transition from one phase to the next phase, for example, pre- primary to primary school (Epstein, 1994; Erdener, 2016). Parenting in this study will focus on how the school is supporting the parents of children with ASD and what parents are doing to provide their children with the necessary support.



- **Type 2: Communicating**

It is the responsibility of the school to keep parents informed about the school's programme; the progress of the child (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Lemmer, 2007). Furthermore, schools have a responsibility towards parents to share information in a way which is comprehensible to all parents, and parents should be open to such communication (Erdener, 2016). It is also important for the parents to communicate with the school by asking questions and providing feedback on teacher's questions or comments (Erdener, 2016). It is crucial for the school, teachers and parents to establish successful two-way communication (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Okeke, 2014). In order to ensure that there is effective communication between the home and school, it is important for the school and teacher to use various ways of communicating with parents, for example, parent-teacher meeting, homework books, parent letters, emails, phone calls, notes, and online platforms for student engagement (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). In the current study, communicating refers to how often teachers and parents of children with ASD communicate with one another and the methods they use to communicate.

- **Type 3: Volunteering**

One of the most direct ways for parents to involve themselves in their children's education is to volunteer at the school or in the classroom (Erdener, 2016). Parents can volunteer their time, talents and resources in different ways (Swart & Phasha, 2011). For example, parents can help by being involved in organising events at school; helping out during classroom field trips or filling in as substitute teachers (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Lemmer, 2007). In the current study, volunteering refers to what parents of children with ASD are doing at their children's school to participate in the activities of their children.

- **Type 4: Learning at home**

It is important for parents and other family members to support their school-going children by helping with and monitoring the learning activities of the children at home (Erdener, 2016; Epstein, 1994). Furthermore, teachers should provide parents with

information on how to help their children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning (Driessen, Smit & Slegers, 2005; Epstein, 1994; Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Michael, Wolhuter, & Van Wyk, 2012). In addition, parents should be provided with information on homework policies and be informed about what is expected of their children in all the subjects in their grades (Epstein, 1994). Lastly, teachers should also provide parents with home-based activities that they can complete with their children, which will ensure that their children have ways to learn outside the classroom (Erdener, 2016). For the purpose of this study, learning at home refers to what parents of children with ASD are doing at home to help them, for example, homework and other curriculum-based activities.

- **Type 5: Decision-making**

Parents should be included in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school governing bodies or councils (Driessen et al., 2005; Epstein, 1994; Erlendsdóttir, 2010). Therefore, it is important that there is a partnership between the parents and the school during the decision-making process (Michael et al., 2012). In the current study, decision-making refers to the ways parents of children with ASD are involved in the decision-making process.

- **Type 6: Collaborating with the community**

According to Epstein and Salinas (2004) collaborating with the community is important as teachers, learners, parents and members of the community work together to improve the school and to enrich the learners' experiences and opportunities for learning. Activities can be conducted during lunch, after school, and at other times by the school, the family and community members to enrich learners' skills and talents (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Schools should coordinate available resources and services for the learners, their families, the school as well as the community (Epstein, 1994). This can include providing information for learners and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support and other programs or services (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Michael et al., 2012).

#### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

Parental involvement in the education of children without ASD has been associated with a number of positive outcomes, including higher levels of academic achievement, lower levels of child behaviour problems, and increased social-emotional skills (Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2013). This involvement is unique for parents of children with ASD (Zablotsky, Boswell & Smith, 2012). A recent study in the United States found that the parents of children with ASD are not involved in their children's education and have poor relationships with their children's teachers. Furthermore, the study found that the parents of children with ASD who are supporting their children by taking them for therapeutic services, had positive relationships with their children's teachers as they were educated on the importance of the involvement of therapists (Sheridan et al., 2013). However, limited research has been conducted on parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in developing countries, such as South Africa (Ellis, 2017). The research may reveal how and to what extent parents are involved in the education of their children with ASD. Furthermore, the results may provide more information on parents' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement, their roles in the education of children with ASD and how parental involvement in the education of their children with ASD can be enhanced.

#### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

**The study was guided by the following research questions:**

Main research question

- How involved are parents and teachers in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district?

Secondary research questions:

- What are parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district?
- What are parents' and teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district?

- What are parents' and teachers' views on how parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district can be enhanced?

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A research methodology is concerned with the theory, methods, conceptualisation, and justification of the procedures used in research (Creswell, 2014). It includes the research design and research methods that will be discussed and elaborated on in Chapter 3.

### **1.6.1 Research paradigm**

Rehman and Alharthi (2016) stated that a paradigm is a belief system and theoretical framework used by researchers to understand and study the reality of the world. Nieuwenhuis (2016) mentioned that there are three main types of paradigms, namely positivist, interpretive, and critical theory. This study was positioned within the interpretivist paradigm to explore how involved parents and teachers are in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district. The research also revealed parents' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD; parents' and teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD and how parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced.

### **1.6.2 Research approach**

Qualitative research is used to understand a research question in a humanistic way, meaning gaining insight of a particular topic based on people's beliefs, attitudes, experiences and behaviour (Pathak, Jena & Kalra, 2013). A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as the researcher was able to collect data on the particular phenomenon in order to better understand what has been observed or studies (Maree, 2016). Sarantakos (2003) reports that the characteristics of a descriptive qualitative research design entail an independent investigation that intends to explain social systems, relations or events to provide history about the event under study.

### **1.6.3 Research design**

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) state that a phenomenological study refers to the researcher understanding the meanings participants attach to an event and how people experience the world around them and how general or universal meanings are derived from individual descriptions (Maree, 2016). By using a phenomenological study as the research design, the researcher was able to comprehend what the experience means for the persons who have encountered these events. Advantages of phenomenological studies include the provision of rich and detailed descriptions of the human experience and the results that may be derived from the data instead of a structured statistical analysis (Boyd, 2016).

### **1.6.4 Research participants and sampling selection**

In this study, convenience sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where members of the target population who meet certain criteria, are included in the study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Convenience sampling is used when participants are selected on the basis of being prepared and available to participate in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Four parents and four teachers were selected to participate in the study. The participants of the study had to meet certain criteria to take part in the research study. The inclusion criteria for the participants are as follows:

The parent must have a child that is diagnosed with ASD.

- The teachers must work at the school currently.
- The child must be a current learner at the school.
- Parents and teachers who provided consent to be included.

The exclusion criteria for the participants were:

- Parents who have children with other special needs.
- Teachers and parents who did not give consent to participate in the study.
- Learners who did not have an ASD diagnosis.
- Teachers not teaching at the school.

### **1.6.5 Data collection methods**

Data were collected by using the study of documents and interviews, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

#### ***1.6.5.1 Interviews***

Interviewing in qualitative research can be seen as the most predominant research method (Greeff, 2011). According to Monette, Sullivan, and De Jong (2005), an interview process is intended to build a relationship with the participants while also obtaining quality information in exchange. Because the aim of the interviews in the study was to see the world through the parents and teachers' eyes, the researcher found individual semi-structured interviews the most appropriate data collection instrument. The researcher used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the participant's personal perspectives and points of view regarding parental involvement in the education of children with ASD.

#### ***1.6.5.2 Document analysis***

The aim of document analysis involving the study of existing documents is to obtain a deeper meaning of the phenomenon under study or to understand the content of the documents at hand (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Different sources can be used during data analysis, such as primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are original documents pertaining to the author's own experiences, whereas secondary sources are derived from someone else as the original source (Maree, 2016). In the current study, the research investigated how and to what extent parents and teachers are involved in the education of children with ASD and reviewed various documents such as the child's homework book, learners' workbooks, teacher portfolios, attendance register of parent meetings and events, parent programmes, and school policies.

### **1.6.6 Data analysis and interpretation**

Data analysis involves reducing the large volume of raw data, identifying significant patterns or themes and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011). Data collected were structured to address the main questions of this study. After all the interviews and the

document analysis were conducted, the researcher organised the data systematically to find the required information. Accordingly, the researcher used Creswell's (2014) steps for the qualitative data analysis as a guideline to analyse the data collected during the interviews and document analysis. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the data processing and data analysis process followed by the researcher in this study.

### **1.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The following criteria were used by the researchers to ensure the trustworthiness of the study by means of the following strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Leedy & Ormrod 2015). These constructs were adhered to when conducting and analysing information from the in-depth interviews, and document analysis that will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

### **1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher acted responsibly towards the participants in the research project and reported the findings honestly and accurately (De Vos et al., 2011). The guiding ethical principles are listed and discussed in Table 3.3 in Chapter 3, as they were applied to the current study.

### **1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

The following key concepts were used in the thesis:

**Autism spectrum disorder** – the term “autism spectrum disorder” (ASD) and autism are often used interchangeably (Caronna, Milunsky & Tager-Flusbeg, 2008). In this study, the term “ASD” is preferred. According to the DSM-5, ASD requires three deficits in social interaction and social communication and at least two symptoms in the category of restricted interests and repetitive behaviours (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Furthermore, these symptoms should be present during the early developmental period and must cause clinically significant impairments in social, occupational or other areas of functioning, that cannot be explained by a global developmental delay or intellectual disability (APA, 2013).

**Special educational needs school** - Special educational needs schools and programmes are for children who have challenges or disabilities that interfere with learning. They provide the support that is not normally provided in general education programmes. These schools and programs tailor learning to address each child's unique combination of needs (Black, 2019)

**Developing countries** - Developing countries are also known as low-and-middle- income countries (LMICs). The residents in LMICs have limited access to quality health care and education. LMICs include, for example, South Africa, Brazil, Bangladesh, Argentina, Nigeria and Botswana (The World Bank, n.d).

**Developed countries** - Developed countries are known as high-income countries (HICs). Residents in HICs have access to high-quality education and health care. HICs include, for example, Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Israel, and Australia (The World Bank, n.d).

**Parent** – The biological, adoptive or legal guardian of a child, or the person who accepts the responsibility to all the obligations with regards to learner's education (DoE, 1996).

**Parental involvement** – Refers to an attempt made by parents to be personally involved in their child's school activities and school functions, assisting teachers at school as well as at home, in order to enhance the educational outcomes for learners (Ntekane, 2018).

## **1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

This thesis comprises five chapters with the following layout:

- Chapter 1: This chapter aims to outline the background, the rationale, the statement of the problem, the research questions and aims, the research methodology, trustworthiness, the ethical considerations, the definition of key concepts as well as the chapter outline, the focus and purpose of the study.



- Chapter 2: This chapter focuses on the literature pertaining to parental involvement of children with ASD. The literature includes:
  - Parents' and teachers' roles in the education of children.
  - The factors that contribute to the lack of parental involvement in the education of children.
  - The benefits of parental involvement in the education of children.
  - Barriers to parental involvement in the education of children.
  - Strategies to enhance parental involvement in the education of children.
- Chapter 3: This chapter provides an in-depth view of the research design and methodology used in this study. The research paradigm, approach, design, sampling procedures, setting, research participants, data collection methods and analysis are discussed. Lastly, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations that were followed in this research are highlighted.
- Chapter 4: In this chapter, the findings from the data collected through the interviews and document analysis were described by the researcher. The data collected were themed, analysed, and the findings were then presented in this chapter.
- Chapter 5: This chapter contains a general discussion as well as the recommendations, limitations, strengths and conclusions pertaining to this study. The major findings of this current study are summarised in this chapter. The theoretical and practical implications are represented and will be compared to recent literature to reflect the significance of the study.

## **1.11 CONCLUSION**

This chapter introduced the background of the study, the rationale, the problem statement, the aims of the study, the research methodology, the theoretical framework, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, the definition of the key concepts, and the chapter outline of this study. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature pertaining to parental involvement in the education of children.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHAPTER 2</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b></p>
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## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter commences with the literature related to parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement followed by parental and teachers' involvement in the education of children with ASD in developed countries, developing countries as well as in South Africa. The chapter will also include the literature concerning attitudes of teachers and parents regarding parental involvement, the roles of parents and teachers in parental involvement, the benefits and barriers that influence parental involvement, the ways in which parents are involved, and strategies to enhance parental involvement.

## **2.2 PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD**

Limited research has been conducted on parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the education of children with ASD (Potter, 2016). The majority of research has focused on parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the education of children without ASD (Potter, 2016). According to Maluleke (2014), parents have a negative attitude towards parental involvement in the education of their children when the level of complexity of the schoolwork becomes more advanced. Parents often reported that they do not receive adequate support from teachers in the form of extra information to assist their children with more complex school work and, therefore, do not want to be involved in their children's education as they themselves do not understand the schoolwork (Brown & Beckett, 2007). Siririka (2007) reported that parents are of the opinion that they do not know the content of the subject and are, therefore, unable to help their children with schoolwork. Parents have also reported that they often do not feel welcome or included in the school and, therefore, do not want to be involved in their child's education (Dixon, 1992). The frequently cited communication gap between the parents and the school is also a contributing factor to parents' negative attitude towards parental involvement (Combs, Elliot & Whipple, 2010; Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Ozgun & Honig, 2004). Parents reported that there is not enough communication between them and the teachers and that they

are only invited to parent meetings when there is a problem with their child (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). This causes frustration for parents and then parents are not motivated to be involved in their child's education (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). Other parents reported that they had a positive attitude towards their involvement in the education of their children (Maluleke, 2014). Parents reported that when they were more involved in their children's education, they had a better knowledge of the school curriculum and the areas in which their children needed improvement (Combs et al., 2010). Therefore, parents who were more involved in the education of their children were more satisfied with their children's education and therefore had a positive attitude towards parental involvement.

### **2.3 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES**

A number of studies have been conducted in developed countries, such as Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States, on parental involvement in the education of children without ASD (Lindsay, Ricketts, Peacey, Dockrell & Charman, 2016; Starr & Foy, 2012; Stokes & Macfarlane, 2011; Zablotsky et al., 2012). A study conducted in Australia found that parents' involvement in the education of their children with ASD were influenced by the severity of the disorder and the involvement of their children's teacher (Stokes & Macfarlane, 2011). Another study conducted in the United States found that parents of children with ASD were more involved in the education of their child (Zablotsky et al., 2012). The study found that parents of children with ASD were more likely than parents without children with the disorder, to attend parents' meetings, meet with the school counsellors and help with homework. Furthermore, parents were more dissatisfied with the level of communication provided by the school (Zablotsky et al., 2012). A study conducted in Canada found that parental involvement in the education of children with ASD was influenced by the teachers' ability to manage children's behaviour, teachers' knowledge and understanding of ASD and the quality of collaboration and communication. Researchers found that parents and teachers of children with ASD were more involved in the education process (Starr & Foy, 2012). Lastly, a study conducted in the United Kingdom also found that parents of children with

ASD were dissatisfied with the involvement in their children's education (Lindsay et al., 2016). The researchers found that parents wanted to be more involved in their children's education, specifically in the decision-making process of their children's education and collaborating with their children's teachers (Lindsay et al., 2016). Apart from parents being involved in their children's education, teachers have just as an important role to play in the children's education (Majozi, 2014). The research found that teachers reported that they had negative attitudes towards parental involvement, especially when parents were less involved in their children's education (Majozi, 2014). Furthermore, teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement were positive when they were supported by the school management through the organising of parent-teacher events, conferences and workshops (Majozi, 2014).

## **2.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

Virtually no research has been conducted on parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in developing countries (Afolabi, 2016; Ellis, 2017). The majority of studies, which were conducted on parental involvement in developing countries focused on children's special educational needs, and not on ASD specifically (Combs et al., 2010; Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Gona et al., 2016; Ozgun & Honig, 2004; Samadi & McConkey, 2011). According to Gona et al. (2016), there are various socio-economic factors in developing countries that may influence the parental involvement of children with special educational needs, such as ASD, these include limited access to health services and quality education, poverty, literacy, HIV/AIDS, the income level of the parents, the education level of the parents, parental understanding of ASD, (Samadi & McConkey, 2011). In Namibia, parents of children with special educational needs were involved in their children's education with regard to having a good relationship with their children's teacher, assisting their children with homework, discussing their children's progress with the teachers and attending parents' meetings (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). In another study conducted in Ghana, 'parental involvement in the education of children with special needs' is a new concept (Botts & Owusu, 2013). Furthermore, parents in the study by Botts and Owusu (2013) reported that they generally trust teachers to

make decisions on behalf of their children. In India, children with special educational needs did not receive any support from their parents and other family members (Manjula, Saraswathi, Prakash & Ashalatha, 2009).

## **2.5 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN SOUTH AFRICA**

As in other developing countries, studies have been conducted on parental involvement in the education of children with and without special educational needs, but limited research on parental involvement in the education of children with ASD (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart, Kitching & Eloff, 2005; Lemmer, 2007; Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010; Yssel, Engelbrecht, Oswald, Eloff & Swart, 2007; Walton, 2010). Stephinah (2014) conducted a study on parental involvement in the education of children with special educational needs in South Africa. The researcher found that teachers were of the opinion that parental involvement was limited, especially in schools in rural areas (Stephinah, 2014). The study recommended that it is important for both parents and teachers to be involved in the education of children with special educational needs; that more should be done in educating parents and teachers on parental involvement; encouraging parents to participate in school activities and organise workshops for parental involvement (Stephinah, 2014). In South Africa, there are many factors, which may influence parental involvement in the education of children with special educational needs, which include poverty, the literacy of parents, the educational level of parents, limited access to quality education, and limited support from teachers (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010).

## **2.6 PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' ROLES IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD**

The various roles played by parents of children with ASD as well as the roles of teachers are discussed next in this regard.

- **Parents' role in the education of children with ASD**

According to the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) (DoE, 1996), parents or guardians have an important role to play in the education of their children. Firstly, parents should ensure that each learner for whom they are responsible be enrolled in a school and attend a school on a regular basis. It is also the parents' responsibility to pay their child's school fees (DoE, 1996). Therefore, parents of children with ASD should ensure that their children are enrolled in a school, their school fees are paid, and they attend school regularly. Furthermore, since South Africa has legislation and policies to include learners both with and without disabilities in mainstream schools, parents should work hard to ensure that their children are admitted if they are refused admission to a mainstream school (DoE, 1996). The South African Schools Act also encourages parents to render voluntary services in schools (DoE, 1996). Therefore, parents of children with ASD should volunteer at their children's school by helping to organise events, by becoming a member of the school governing body (SGB) or by providing assistance when needed by the school. Parents should also be involved in their children's education by attending parent-teacher meetings to talk over their children's academic progress (DoE, 1996). Therefore, parents of children with ASD should be involved in their child's education by attending the parent-teacher meetings at their children's school and monitor their children's academic progress. Monitoring their children's progress can be done by having telephonic conversations with the teachers, meeting them in person or communicating by email.

Furthermore, it is important for parents to be involved in their children's education by supporting their children in different ways (Stoner & Angell, 2006). For example, parents should be supporting their children by helping them with homework, by preparing them for tests, by taking them to paraprofessionals if they need extra support (Burrell & Borrego, 2012). Therefore, parents of children with ASD should provide their children with the necessary support needed whether it is with homework, test preparation or ensuring that they get the extra help needed from paraprofessionals to address their learning needs.

- **Teachers' role in the education of children with ASD**

The educational implications of ASD are far-reaching and teachers have an important role to play in the education of children with ASD (Diggle & McConachie, 2003; Wing, 1998). Children with ASD may present difficulties in social interaction, behaviour, communication, listening, rigidity, attention to tasks, organisation, and alertness (Schafer et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand how to adapt the curriculum and environment for learners who experience barriers to learning, such as ASD (Wilson et al., 2017). Learners with ASD have specific educational needs and it is important that teachers use differentiated teaching strategies and methods when teaching the content of the curriculum to such learners (Sulaimani & Gut, 2019; Wilson et al., 2017).

Furthermore, teachers should adapt their classrooms to ensure that they accommodate for the needs of children with ASD by creating an individual workstation, by limiting visual cluttering, by rearranging the layout so that they can easily move around, by changing the amount of lighting, and by reducing noise levels in the classroom (Bayat, 2012). It is also the teachers' responsibility to provide effective support to children with ASD by collaborating with paraprofessionals and by developing individualised support plans for the learners (Vakil, Welton, O'Connor & Kline, 2008). Lastly, it is important for teachers to establish a positive, respectful relationship with the parents of children with ASD and involve them in the education of their children. Teachers should create opportunities at school to involve parents in parent-teacher meetings, parent workshops, and school-activities (Todd, Beamer & Goodreau, 2014).

## **2.7 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE LACK OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD.**

The research conducted in different countries found that there are various factors that contribute to the lack of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD (Benson et al., 2008; Todd et al., 2014). In a study conducted by Lall, Campbell and Gillborn (2004) in the United Kingdom, parents of children with special educational needs, such as ASD, reported that the nature of their relationship with the school was

influencing their involvement in their children's education. Parents reported that they had difficulties communicating with the school and the school did not have time to attend to the parents' questions and needs. Furthermore, previous research found that parental involvement can be affected by socioeconomic conditions, such as the parents' educational background (Jafarov, 2015). Parents whose educational levels are low may be less involved in their children's education because they do not feel confident enough to contact the school staff (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Furthermore, parents with low educational levels are unable to help their children with homework or school-related tasks as their knowledge or literacy is limited (Jafarov, 2015). In contrast, parents with university degrees reported that their main reason for not being involved in their children's education was their lack of time (Baeck, 2010). Another study conducted by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) found that parents' beliefs about the effects of parental involvement influenced their involvement. In addition, the income levels of parents also influence parents' involvement (Jafarov, 2015). For example, parents with a high income were more involved in their children's education than parents with low incomes (Jafarov, 2015). Another factor influencing parental involvement is the family structure (Jordan, Orozco & Averett, 2001). Children with a single parent or step-parents are provided with less support in comparison with children who live in two-parent families (Jordan et al., 2001). Marital disruptions can lead to less involvement in the education of children as there is reduced time for parents to spend with children (Jordan et al., 2001).

According to a study by Hartley, Barker, Seltzer, Greenberg & Floyd (2011), the divorce rate for parents raising children with ASD is higher than for parents of children without disabilities. Therefore, parents of children with ASD may be less involved because they are divorced and unable to spend a large amount of time with their children (Benson et al., 2008). Another factor which may influence parental involvement is a lack of communication between the parent and teacher (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). Parents do not always respond to letters and other forms of communication from the school, and teachers may, therefore, feel that the parents are not willing to become involved in the school (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). On the other hand, parents often feel that the teacher may not really want parents to be involved (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). Thus, parents and teachers often have misconceptions about each other, which impact the involvement of parents and teachers



in the education of their children (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). Parents believe that their sole responsibility is to send their children to school and the school must take over from that point and are, thus, not willing to be involved in their children's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Another barrier to parental involvement pertains to language issues, especially when the parents' language and the language of instruction are different, communication between the home and the school are not effective and may contribute to the parents' lack of confidence and non-involvement (Manilal, 2014). Manilal (2014) also suggests that it is not necessarily the lack of interest that prevents parents from becoming involved in their children's education, but rather barriers that include poverty, the effects of the HIV/Aids pandemic, non-English literacy, single-parenthood and cultural and socioeconomic isolation. Parents who are among the poorest sections of society are faced with a difficult struggle to survive, they live in inadequate housing, work unusual hours, are paid poorly or are unemployed (Okeke, 2014). Some parents do not have transport that is easily available to them as they live a great distance away from the school, thus, they, therefore, cannot attend parent-teacher meetings or visit the school on a regular basis (Michael et al., 2012).

## **2.8 BENEFITS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD**

The importance of parental participation in the education of young children with ASD is well-documented, with research linking parental involvement to a variety of positive child outcomes, including improved skills maintenance and generalisation, as well as to enhanced family functioning and well-being (Koegel, Bimbela & Schreibman, 1996). (Moes & Frea, 2002). As a result, it is now widely acknowledged that parental involvement constitutes a crucial 'best practice' in the education of young children with ASD (National Research Council, 2001). Furthermore, other benefits of parental involvement include improved academic outcomes, which include learners' academic achievement and performance, and aspirations, but also a non-academic outcome which includes attendance, behaviour, attitude, homework, self-esteem, motivation, and self-discipline (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Manilal, 2014). Research also found that parental

involvement benefits the teacher's morale, the mental health of the learners, parental confidence and parental satisfaction and interest in children's education as well (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Michael et al., 2012).

Teachers can also benefit from successful parental involvement when they increase their understanding of parental involvement and understand the concerns that the parents have for their children (Newchurch, 2017). Communication between parents and teachers is extremely important and, therefore, in order to avoid a misunderstanding, there should be regular communication between parents and teachers (Jooste, 2011). The positive development of children's self-concept can be enhanced through a partnership between teachers and parents (Cheng & Chen, 2018). In order for children to be successful in school, their success depends on a triangle of interaction between the teacher, the parent and the child. Thus, a working partnership between parents and teachers enhances the opportunities to help a child to learn positive behaviour successfully (Prinsloo & Gasa, 2011).

## **2.9 BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD**

Parents only want what is best for their children but working full-time, together with other obligations makes involvement in their child's education challenging (Savacool, 2011). Furthermore, Murphy and Tierney (2010) reported that parents do not necessarily have the knowledge to know that their children have ASD or that they are in denial about the diagnosis. According to Makewa and Role (2012), there are a number of other factors that create barriers to parental involvement. These include parents' socioeconomic conditions, parents' occupation, educational attainment, family type, family size, high rates of divorce, lower sense of well-being of the family, parents' mental and physical health, feelings about the school, self-efficacy issues with regard to helping their children to succeed in their school work. Other factors are the roles they believe they play in motivating their children, language barriers, cultural understanding conflicts, financial and work-related restraints, an atmosphere that is not always welcoming, judgemental attitudes, inconvenient scheduling and a lack of resources in time and

money (Bartel, 2010; Horvatin, 2011; Karst & Van Hecke, 2012; Makewa & Role, 2012). Limited research has been conducted on the barriers contributing to parental involvement in children with ASD in South Africa (Lemmer, 2007). Therefore, there is a need to investigate the factors contributing to barriers to parental involvement of children with ASD in South Africa further.

## **2.10 ENHANCING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD**

Since there are numerous benefits to parental involvement, it is important for both teachers and schools to create opportunities to enhance parental involvement for parents of children with ASD (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Michael et al., 2012). Parental involvement can be enhanced in the following ways:

### **2.10.1 Educating parents**

If parents are educated about their children's diagnosis and associated challenges, they might be able to understand their children better and become more involved in their children's education (Eakin, 2006). Therefore, it is important for professionals, which include teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists to provide parents with information on how to become more involved in their children's education and how they can provide their children with the necessary support (Eakin, 2006). Parents need to be provided with the relevant information and resources on ASD and available support that could be provided for them (Chee & Chua, 2015). The researcher is of the opinion that parents do not always have the knowledge to be able to assist the child with homework or schoolwork; therefore, providing parents with training programs may enable them to be of assistance when it concerns their children's education.

### **2.10.2 Empowering parents**

Parents are the primary caretakers of children and, therefore, they should be allowed to have a say in the intervention program of their children and they should feel that their opinion is valuable (Chee & Chua, 2015). Furthermore, parents can easily be

overwhelmed and therefore, it is important that the goals of children with ASD are achievable and manageable (Eakin, 2006). The researcher is of the opinion that when parents of children with ASD are involved in the decision making of the children's education, they feel that they can become more involved in other aspects of the children's education.

### **2.10.3 Partnership with parents**

Parents, teachers and professionals should work together to determine goals for their children (Gooch, 2016). It is always important for parents' decisions to be respected (Eakin, 2006). During the education process, learners with ASD learn across multiple settings such as the home, school, and the community is the shared and continuous responsibility of parents and professionals (Swart & Phasha, 2011). Parents of children with ASD need to be actively involved with the teachers and other professionals so that they can share information, provide feedback on their child's education, share decision making, and determine goals (Chee & Chua, 2015). It is the researcher's opinion that by involving the parents, they may feel that their opinion is of value and they will put in more effort to build a trusting relationship with the school and the teachers.

### **2.10.4 Parents can become members of the school governing body (SGB)**

Parents can volunteer to become part of the school's SGB and therefore become more involved in their children's education as they can have a say in the school's governance (DoE, 2004). The functions of the SGB include determining the school policy, determining the language and admission policy and making recommendations about the appointments of teachers and administrative personnel (DoE, 1996). If parents are part of the SGB, they can have a say in the schools' policies and, therefore, advocate for their children with ASD by formulating or revising policies so that they are more inclusive.

#### **2.10.5 Parents can become involved in the organisation of events at the school**

Parents of children with ASD can become involved in their children's education by volunteering their time to help organise events such as fundraising, sports coaching and field trips (Swart & Phasha, 2011).

#### **2.10.6 Parents can become involved in the classroom**

Parents of children with ASD can become involved in the classroom by assisting the teacher to create the learning resources that are used during the year (Vogel, Dednam & Landsberg, 2011). Furthermore, parents can accompany the teachers during outings and be a substitute teacher when a teacher is on sick leave or perhaps study leave (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Lemmer, 2007).

#### **2.10.7 Parents as representatives of the community**

Parents' can become advocates for ASD by creating awareness about ASD in their community. Some parents might be doctors or nurses and can come to school to give informative presentations on the early symptoms of ASD or provide vaccinations to children with ASD in the community (Vogel et al., 2011).

### **2.11 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the relevant literature related to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. The literature review focused on aspects relating to parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in children with ASD; parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in developed and developing countries; parents' and teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD; factors contributing to the lack of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD; benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD; barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD and how to enhance parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodology followed in the study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter highlighted the literature findings on parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. This chapter focuses on the research aims, the research design, the sampling procedures, the participants, the data collection methods, the data analysis and ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH AIMS**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

Main aim:

- To determine how involved parents and teachers are in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district.

Sub-aims:

- To explore parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district.
- To describe parents' and teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district.
- To explore parents' and teachers' views on how parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district can be enhanced:

#### **3.3 RESEARCH METHODS**

The researcher will describe the methodology that was selected to investigate the phenomenon for this specific thesis. The research paradigm, research approach and research design will be discussed.

##### **3.3.1 Research paradigm**

A research paradigm is a model which the social scientists use to view the objects of the research (Vosloo, 2014). The research paradigm also refers to the purpose of the research and how it will be conducted in accordance with the researcher's research and how paradigmatic beliefs. In the current study, the researcher used an interpretative stance.

The interpretivist researcher tends to rely upon the participants' views of the situation being studied and recognises the impact of the research on their own backgrounds and experiences (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, since the researcher is a teacher working with learners experiencing barriers to learning, such as ASD, she was able to understand the parents' and teachers' perceptions better based on her personal experience. The researcher distanced herself by keeping in mind that each child with ASD are unique and they have with different needs. The research was not conducted in the school where the researcher currently teaches. Furthermore, this approach gave the researcher the opportunity to understand the experiences of the teachers and parents by collecting data using qualitative methods which included interviews and document analysis.

### **3.3.2 Research approach**

A qualitative research approach is used to seek an in-depth understanding of the phenomena, situation, problem or event in naturalistic settings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Also, qualitative research is concerned with non-statistical methods and small samples (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). To understand the perspectives of the participants, the researcher employed a qualitative approach in this study and collected data using document analysis and interviews in naturalistic settings (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

### **3.3.3 Research design**

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of a lived experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), phenomenological research focuses on the commonality of lived experiences within a particular group. The primary goal of the phenomenological design is to explore what other people experienced and focuses on their experience of a phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In the current study, the researcher conducted interviews with the teachers and parents involved in the education of children with ASD in a school for special educational needs in Emalahleni. The researcher also used document analysis to obtain information about parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. After the data collection process, the researcher analysed the data and was able to arrive at a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

## **3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA) (see Appendix A). After ethical clearance was obtained, the researcher requested permission to conduct research from the special educational needs school (see Appendix B).

The researcher acted responsibly towards the participants in the study and reported the findings honestly and accurately (Strydom, 2011). The following guiding ethical principles that were applied in the current study are discussed in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Ethical principles applied in the research study**

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Application to study</b>
<b><i>Avoidance of harm: Research involving human subjects is based on the principle that it should be conducted in a way that minimises harm or risk (Leedy &amp; Ormrod, 2015).</i></b>	Participants in the study were teachers and parents who provided information by participating in the semi-structured interviews. There was no direct contact with the learners with ASD as the teachers and parents were the units of analysis. No teacher or parent was exposed to any risks during the study. Furthermore, teachers and parents did not receive any direct benefits as a result of the study.
<b><i>Voluntary participation: Participation should be voluntary at all times, and no one should be forced to participate in a project (Leedy &amp; Ormrod, 2015).</i></b>	Teachers and parents were informed about the importance of the study, and that their participation was voluntary. The consent letter stated that teachers and parents may withdraw from the study at any time, without any adverse consequences.
<b><i>Informed consent: Respect for persons requires that participants be given the opportunity to choose what shall or shall not happen to them (Leedy &amp; Ormrod, 2015).</i></b>	The researcher provided the teachers and parents with an informed consent letter (see Appendix D & E). Teachers and parents gave informed consent to participate in the research study.
<b><i>Integrity – avoiding deception of participants: Deception refers to misleading participants, deliberately misrepresenting facts or withholding information from participants (Strydom, 2011)</i></b>	No parent or teacher was misled regarding the research project. An informed consent letter was given to the teachers, and that explained all the details and processes of the research study (Appendix D and E).
<b><i>Anonymity and confidentiality: Information collected during a research study is confidential and</i></b>	Only the researcher and supervisors had access to the raw data obtained from the interviews (Appendix G & H) and document analysis (Appendix F). The names of the schools, school principals, names of the teachers and parents were not disclosed in the study.



Principle	Application to study
<i>should be provided anonymously in reporting to ensure the privacy of the participants (Nelson, 2016).</i>	
<b><i>Actions and competence of the researcher: Researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent, honest, and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation (Strydom, 2011).</i></b>	The researcher is a qualified teacher and has completed a bachelors' degree in the same field of interest. The researcher is furthermore familiar with the context and is collaborating with other experts in the field.
<b><i>Appropriate storage of data: Data collected in research studies should be safeguarded and stored appropriately (Strydom, 2011a)</i></b>	The policy of the University of South Africa's Policy for the Preservation and Retention of Research Data states that data collected should be stored electronically, as well as in hard copy for fifteen years. Therefore, the researcher will ensure that the data is stored as a hard copy and electronically for fifteen years in the Department of Inclusive Education.

### 3.5 SETTING

According to Erasmus, Kritzinger & Van der Linde (2019), the majority of school-going children are being accommodated in special educational needs schools throughout the country. Prior to data collection, the researcher consulted with Autism South Africa (ASA) and requested a list of the public and private schools accommodating learners with ASD in the Emalahleni district. At the time of data collection, there were two special educational needs public and private schools accommodating learners with ASD and other developmental disorders. However, only one private school granted the researcher permission to conduct research at the school.

The research was conducted at a private school for children with special educational needs in Emalahleni. The school was established in 2013. Since 2013, the school had to increase the number of learners admitted annually as there was an increase in children with ASD that needed special education. The school currently accommodates 65 learners with ASD and other developmental disabilities. Parents apply to the school for admission by completing an application form. The application form is then paper screened by the school assessment team to determine whether the child is a candidate for the school. The parents usually provide the school with medical reports indicating

the type of disability, such as ASD. After the parents apply for admission, the learner attends a week-long trial period where the learner is assessed by the principal according to the Special Needs Adapted Programme (SNAP) to determine the level of functionality establish and to establish which program will suit the child's needs best. SNAP was developed as a result of the need for high-quality education for learners with special educational needs in South Africa. The SNAP programme offers one-on-one tutoring and foundation phase schooling from Grade 00 – Grade 7 with an adapted Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). In addition, the school has three phases that include the remedial phase, the foundation phase and the intermediate phase. In all three phases, the learners with ASD receive some level of support ranging from low to high. The learners are between the ages of three to eighteen years (personal communication with the principal).

### **3.6 PARTICIPANTS**

The participants included parents of learners with ASD in the selected school as well as teachers working with learners with ASD at the selected school.

#### **3.6.1 Sampling method and selection criteria**

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) describe the population as a group of individuals from which the researcher draws a sample to enable the researcher to generalise the results. In any type of research, it would be ideal to use the whole population, but it is not always possible to include everyone because the population is too large. In this study, convenience sampling was used to select the participants for the study. Convenience sampling occurs when participants are selected on the basis of being willing and available to participate in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Only parents of learners with ASD attending the selected school and teachers currently teaching learners with ASD who were willing to participate in the study were selected for the study. There were ten learners with ASD in the school, and ten parents (mothers or fathers of the ten learners) were invited to participate in the study. Only four (40%) parents completed the consent form and were willing to participate in the study. With

regard to the teachers, there were seven teachers in the school, and only four (57.1%) teachers gave consent to participate in the study.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- The parent must have a child that is diagnosed with ASD.
- The teachers must currently work at the school and be teaching learners with ASD.
- The child must be a current learner at the school.

### **3.6.2 Sample size.**

The sample comprised four parents of learners with ASD and four teachers teaching learners with ASD in the selected school. Section 3.6.3 provides a detailed description of the participants. The parents consisted of two mothers (50%) and two fathers (50%). The parents were between the ages of 25 and 40. Four female (100%) teachers between the ages of 30 and 60 were selected to be in the sample.

### **3.6.3 Participant description**

Section 3.6.3.1 and 3.6.3.2 provides a detailed description of the participants in the study.

#### **3.6.3.1 Profiles of teachers.**

Table 3.2 displays the profiles of teachers (n=4) that were interviewed.

**Table 3.2: Profiles of teachers (n=4)**

Teacher	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4
Population group	Coloured	White	White	White
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	36	55	41	30
Highest qualification	Grade 12	Grade 12	Grade 12	BEd foundation phase
Experience	Less than ten	More than ten	More than ten	Less than ten

Teacher	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4
	years' teaching experience	years' teaching experience	years' teaching experience	years' teaching experience
<b>Phase teacher is teaching</b>	Intermediate phase	Foundation phase	Foundation phase	Foundation phase

As can be seen in Table 3.2, participants were requested to provide the researcher with information on their population group, gender, age, their highest qualification, experience and the phase they are teaching.

Seventy-five percent of the participant teachers in this study belong to the white population group and twenty-five percent belong to the coloured population group. According to Statistics South Africa (2018), 46.8% of the population group in Emalahleni is white and 2% of the population group is coloured. A possible explanation for the fact that more participant teachers were from the white and coloured population group than other population groups might be because only one school was selected for the study. Therefore, no generalisations can be made beyond the sample.

One hundred percent of the participant teachers were female. According to a study conducted by DoE (2017), 73% of the teachers are female and 26,5% are male. DoE (2015), found that 68% of teachers in Mpumalanga are female, and 32% are male. Due to the fact that only one school was selected for this study, the results of the literature do not correspond with the results of the current study.

Fifty percent of the teachers who participated in this study were between the ages of 30 years and 40 years (30 years and 36 years), twenty-five percent of the teachers were 41 years of age and twenty-five percent were 55 years of age. According to Armstrong (2015), recent numbers obtained from government payroll data show that the modal age for teachers between the years 2009 and 2012, is older than the age of 40. An explanation can be that the sample size was small, and the school that was selected only has female teachers.

Furthermore, seventy-five percent of the participants' highest qualification is Grade 12 and only twenty-five percent of the participant teachers have a Bachelor of Education Foundation degree. Over seventy-five percent of the participant teachers in the study do not have post-secondary education in the field of education, let alone special needs education. A possible explanation may be that post-secondary education in South Africa is expensive (Naidoo & McKay, 2018) and limited post-secondary training is available on teaching learners with ASD in South Africa (Chambers, De Vries, Delehanty & Wetherby, 2018).

Table 3.2 also provides an overview of the different phases the teachers are currently teaching. Seventy-five percent of the participant teachers are teaching the foundation phase, the other twenty-five per cent are teaching the intermediate phase. The reason why more participant teachers were teaching the foundation phase was that there were more learners with ASD in the foundation phase. Learners are placed into a specific phase according to their functional ability, not according to age.

### **3.6.3.2 Profiles of parents**

Table 3.3 displays the profiles of parents (n=4) that were interviewed.

**Table 3.3 Profiles of parents (n=4)**

Parents	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 3	Parent 4
Relationship to child	Mother	Mother	Father	Father
Gender of child	Male	Male	Male	Male
Child's age	10	16	16	11
Child's population group	White	White	White	White

<b>Parents</b>	<b>Parent 1</b>	<b>Parent 2</b>	<b>Parent 3</b>	<b>Parent 4</b>
<b>Child's primary home language</b>	Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Afrikaans
<b>Other siblings with ASD</b>	No	No	No	No
<b>Parent's population group</b>	White	White	White	White
<b>Highest qualification of the father</b>	No information is available about the qualification of the father	NQF level 6 – National higher diploma	NQF level 6 – National higher diploma	NQF level 4 – Grade 12
<b>Marital status of the mother</b>	Divorced	Married	Married	Married
<b>Highest qualification of the mother</b>	NQF level 3 – Grade 11	NQF level 6 – National diploma	NQF level 6 – National diploma	NQF level 4 – Grade 12
<b>Breadwinner</b>	Mother	Father	Father	Father
<b>How many people living in your household</b>	Two	Four	Four	Four

As can be seen in Table 3.3, the participants were requested to provide the researcher with information on their relationship with the child, the child's date of birth, the gender of child, the child's age, the child's population group, the child's primary home language, other siblings with ASD, parents' population group, the highest qualification of the father, the marital status of the mother, the highest qualification of the mother, the highest qualification of the primary caregiver, who the breadwinner is, and how many people live in their household.

Fifty percent of the parent participants were mothers, and the other fifty percent were fathers. Mothers appear to participate in family-related autism studies, both in LMICs and HICs. In a study conducted in autism-specific schools in Northern India, it was found that seventy-five percent of the participants were mothers (Tripathi, Waxha, Cheung & Lui, 2015). In another study conducted in the United States, 86% of the participants were mothers of children with ASD (Mandell & Salzer, 2007).

In this study, all the parent participants' children were males. It is interesting to note in this regard, that evidence suggests that ASD is more prevalent in males than in females. In a study conducted in fifteen high-and-middle-income countries (UK, Denmark, US, Japan, Sweden, Ireland, Germany, Canada, France, Indonesia, Portugal, Finland, Iceland, Israel and Norway), the male-to-female ratio was 4.2:1 (Fombonne, 2009).

The mean age of the children in the school was 13.2 years. A possible explanation of why the learners were older may be because according to the South African Schools Act (DoE, 1996), children between the ages of 7-15 are compelled to attend school.

The population groups and home languages of the children represent the cultural and linguistic profiles of the learners in the schools. The results showed that all four parents indicated that they and their children belonged to the white population group and that their primary language at home was Afrikaans. A possible explanation may be because 46.8% of the population in Emalahleni is White, and 42.4% of the population in Emalahleni speaks Afrikaans (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

None of the parents in this study shared that they had more than one child diagnosed with ASD. More families reported having children with ASD in a longitudinal study conducted in twelve international network sites by the Baby Siblings Consortium (BSRC) (Ozonoff et al., 2011). The researchers indicated that the chances of families having one or more children with ASD are about 20% (Ozonoff et al., 2011). Therefore,

it remains important that families are counselled about the genetic risk of having another child with ASD.

The findings of this study showed that fifty percent of the fathers and mothers in the study had post-secondary education. The post-secondary attainment level in this study was higher than the national post-secondary attainment level (namely, 9.1%) reported in SA (Statistics South Africa, 2015). The results for this study are in agreement with a study conducted in Iran in autism-specific schools that found that 51% of the parents had post-secondary education (Samadi, Mahmoodizadeh & McConkey, 2012).

A large percentage of mothers in our study indicated that they were married (75%). Only one mother indicated that she was divorced. More mothers in this study indicated that they were married than the national status of married mothers (52.6%) reported in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2015). The results of this study are not in agreement with a study conducted in autism-specific schools in South Africa by Erasmus et al. (2019), who found that 55.1% of the parents were unmarried. The majority of parents in this study indicated that the fathers (75%) were the breadwinners of the household. The results of this study contradict a survey conducted by the African Bank (2017) that found that the majority of breadwinners in South Africa are women.

Seventy-five percent of the parents indicated that four people were living in their household. The total number of people living in the household included the children with ASD, the parents and other family members. There is limited information available on the household composition of families with ASD in LMICs and HICs (Schlebusch, Dada & Samuels, 2017). Studies conducted in HICs mostly report on the number of children with ASD or other disabilities living in the household, and not the total number of people (Bromley, Hare, Davison & Emerson, 2004; Jo et al., 2015; Parish, Thomas, Williams & Crossman, 2015).



### **3.7 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

Most qualitative research depends on the use of multiple methods to collect data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). As mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 1.6.5.1 and 1.6.5.2), the researcher used interviews and document analysis to collect data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The interviews and document analysis used in the study will be discussed in the next section.

#### **3.7.1 Interviews**

In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are the most predominant method of research (Maree, 2016). The semi-structured interviews for the study consisted of predetermined questions that allowed the researcher to probe and clarify answers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method for this study. In addition, the researcher was able to obtain direct quotations from the participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Therefore, the interviews allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of parents' and teachers' perspectives on parental involvement in the education of children with ASD.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents and teachers between February to November 2018. The researcher arranged the interviews at locations convenient for the participants such as the school or the participants' homes. Conducting the interviews in familiar environments set the participants at ease (Maree, 2016). Before the researcher started with the interviews, she made sure that she had a pen and notepad at hand, to write important information down. Furthermore, with permission from the participants, the researcher also recorded the semi-structured interviews on a tape recorder in order for her to be able to listen to their responses afterwards. The semi-structured interviews lasted for approximately 20 minutes and were transcribed verbatim (Maree, 2016). A predetermined number of questions (see Appendix G and H) were asked which focused on their own views and perceptions regarding parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. The researcher asked several types of questions such as yes/no questions and open-ended questions

(Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The interview questions for the parents (Appendix G) consisted of two sub-sections. Section A focused on obtaining the demographic characteristics of the child and parents. Section B focussed on obtaining information about the family, what it is like to be the parent of a child with ASD, parents' understanding of parental involvement, parents' role in parental involvement, who should initiate parental involvement, the responsibilities of a parent with a child with ASD, areas that parents feel where they need support, how parents feel the school can support them better. In addition, information was obtained on how parents are informed about what happens in school, how many parents' meetings parents attended this year, what parent's views are on parent meetings, in which activities they are involved at their child's school, parents' opinions regarding the opportunities available for parental involvement at school. Furthermore, information was sought on the factors influencing parental involvement in their children's education, which helps the children with homework, the support offered by the school to help with homework, and suggestions for strategies to support parents. The interview questions for the teachers (Appendix H) also consisted of two sub-sections. Section A focused on obtaining demographic information about the teachers. The following section, section B, focused on teachers' understanding of parental involvement, how teachers encourage high levels of parental involvement, the benefits of teachers being involved in children's education, parent's role in parental involvement, who should initiate parental involvement, what parents do that indicates they are involved in their child's education. In addition, information was sought on the school support offered to parents of children with ASD, how teachers feel the school can support the parents of children with ASD better, how parents are informed about what happens in school, whether parents are attending parent meetings, what teacher's views are on parent meetings. Furthermore, information was elicited on the activities the parents are involved at their child's school, teacher's opinions regarding the opportunities available for parental involvement at school, the factors influencing parental involvement in their child's education, what challenges teachers think parents face with parental involvement of their child's education.

### **3.7.2 Document analysis**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), document analysis is also a rich source of information. The researcher made use of document analysis to collect more useful information. Leedy and Ormrod (2015) state that document analysis sheds significant light on the phenomenon being investigated. The documents include, but are not limited to, institutional documents, policies, files and records (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In the current study, the researcher analysed the following documents to help answer the research questions:

- Homework books of the learners
- Learners workbooks
- Teacher portfolios
- Attendance registers
- School policies on homework

These specific documents were viewed in order to answer the research questions posed in the study. Furthermore, the documents provided more evidence of parental involvement in the school. Lastly, the documents supplemented the interview responses.

The documents were obtained in the following way:

- Permission was obtained from the principal to obtain the documents.
- Consent was obtained from the learner's parents to view their workbooks and homework books.
- The documents were viewed at a pre-arranged time.

### **3.8 DATA COLLECTION**

The data collection procedures which were followed after obtaining ethical clearance for the study are discussed next.

### **3.8.1 Data collection procedures**

- The researcher contacted the principal of the school and requested permission from her to conduct the research at the school.
- Next, the researcher discussed specific dates with the principal to conduct the research at the school.
- After that, the teachers and parents were given information letters with consent forms to read through and complete.
- Subsequently, the researcher collected the completed consent forms from the teachers and the parents.
- The researcher arranged specific dates and times to conduct interviews with the teachers and parents.
- Accordingly, the researcher conducted all the interviews and analysed the documents in the school.
- The researcher transcribed the interviews and recorded the data that was obtained from the documents analysed.
- Following which, the researcher analysed the data and wrote up the results.
- The researcher completed the research project.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis in qualitative research involves a process of coding, organising, categorising and interpreting data to provide an explanation of the phenomenon of interest (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The data gathered through interview transcripts and document analysis were read and reread to identify the relevant information.

The researcher conducted an inductive thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and document analysis. This allowed her to identify relationships, patterns and categories portrayed and to compare the themes (Harling, 2012). This method of analysis was appropriate for the study as it provided the researcher with an opportunity to be guided by her own style of thinking and reflect on interpretations (Basit, 2010). Furthermore, this form of analysis provided the researcher with a chance to investigate

multiple realities, and to search for answers through the descriptions provided by the participants (Bosit, 2010).

Throughout the study, the researcher aimed to obtain an understanding of parental involvement as a whole, after examining all the interviews and documents. Furthermore, the researcher followed the advice of Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999), who maintain that it is important to keep close to the data in order to interpret them from a place of understanding. Lastly, the researcher focused on applying a critical perspective instead of taking information at face value (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin & Lowden, 2011)

The researcher followed the guidelines of Creswell (2014) for the inductive analysis:

- Assigned codes to the transcripts and the documents analysed.
- Familiarised herself with the data.
- Prepared and sorted the data.
- Noted the comments and reflections in the margins.
- Sorted through the material to identify similar and different phases, patterns and themes.
- Interpreted and explained the meanings of themes and descriptions, then drew conclusions.
- Examined final conclusions against existing literature.

### **3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The trustworthiness of this study was achieved by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and authenticity (Maree, 2016). The researcher ensured trustworthiness by applying the following:

#### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the extent to which the results approximate reality and are judged to be reasonable and trustworthy (McMillan & Schumacher 2014). Credibility is enhanced through the development of an early familiarity with the participants, but also through purposive sampling, detailed data collection methods and triangulation (Nieuwenhuis 2016).

To ensure that credibility was achieved the researcher used interviews with parents, interviews with teacher and document analysis to understand the involvement of parents and teachers in the education of children with ASD. By conducting these interviews, the researcher was allowed to determine credibility through an in-depth description of the data derived from the setting.

During the data collection period, the researcher established relationships with the participants to ensure that they felt comfortable with the researcher's presence and to answer the questions as honest as possible. When participants did not understand the questions during the interview, the researcher provided further clarification.

The goal is to demonstrate that the research was conducted in a manner to ensure that the acquired information has been accurately identified and described (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011).

#### Transferability

According to Maluleke (2014), transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the person doing the generalising. Since the findings of the research study are specific to one school and a small number of participants, it was impossible to predict if the findings and conclusions will be applicable to other situations and settings.

#### Dependability

Dependability is demonstrated through the research design and the implementation thereof. The research design that the researcher initially chose, may change when conducting the study as new data sources and data-gathering techniques can be incorporated (Nieuwenhuis 2016). According to Shenton (2004), if the research study were to be repeated by another researcher in the same context using the same methods and the same participants, similar results would have to be obtained. The researcher ensured that the same methods were used to ensure that similar results was obtained. As mentioned before, the researcher used interviews with parents, interviews with teacher and

document analysis to understand the involvement of parents and teachers in the education of children with ASD, to ensure the validation of the findings. The data collected through the interview questions were recorded on a tape recorder, and that was the participant's exact own words.

### Confirmability

According to Shenton (2004), ensuring real objectivity is difficult since tests and questionnaires are designed by humans and the intrusion of the researcher's biases is inevitable. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher kept in mind that personal attitude and emotions could affect the researcher as well as the participants. By examining personal opinions and attitudes, the researcher determined how these would influence the research study. The researcher spent more time with participants and was able to establish a sound relationship with the participants and therefore added to the rigorousness of study. The researcher ensured that the research findings were the result of the participants' experiences and ideas and not the preferences of the researcher.

### **3.11 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the researcher provided an in-depth view of the research design and methodology used in this study. This included a discussion of the research aims, methods, ethical considerations, setting, participants, data collection instruments, data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness. Lastly, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations that were followed in this research are highlighted. The following chapter, Chapter 4, reports on the findings of the study and interpreting the data.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHAPTER 4</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS</b></p>
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#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the foregoing chapter, the researcher discussed the research methodology employed in the study. This chapter presents the results and analysis of data collected regarding parental involvement at the special educational needs school accommodating learners with ASD in Emalahleni. The researcher presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged following inductive thematic data analysis. Furthermore, she includes verbatim quotations from the transcripts. The literature is also infused in the discussion of the findings followed by conclusions drawn by the researcher. The research questions that guided this study will be discussed next.

##### **4.1.1 Key research question.**

- How involved are parents and teachers in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district?

##### **4.1.2 Sub-questions.**

- What are parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district?
- What are parents' and teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district?
- What are parents' and teachers' views on how the parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district can be enhanced?

#### **4.2 DATA ANALYSIS METHOD**

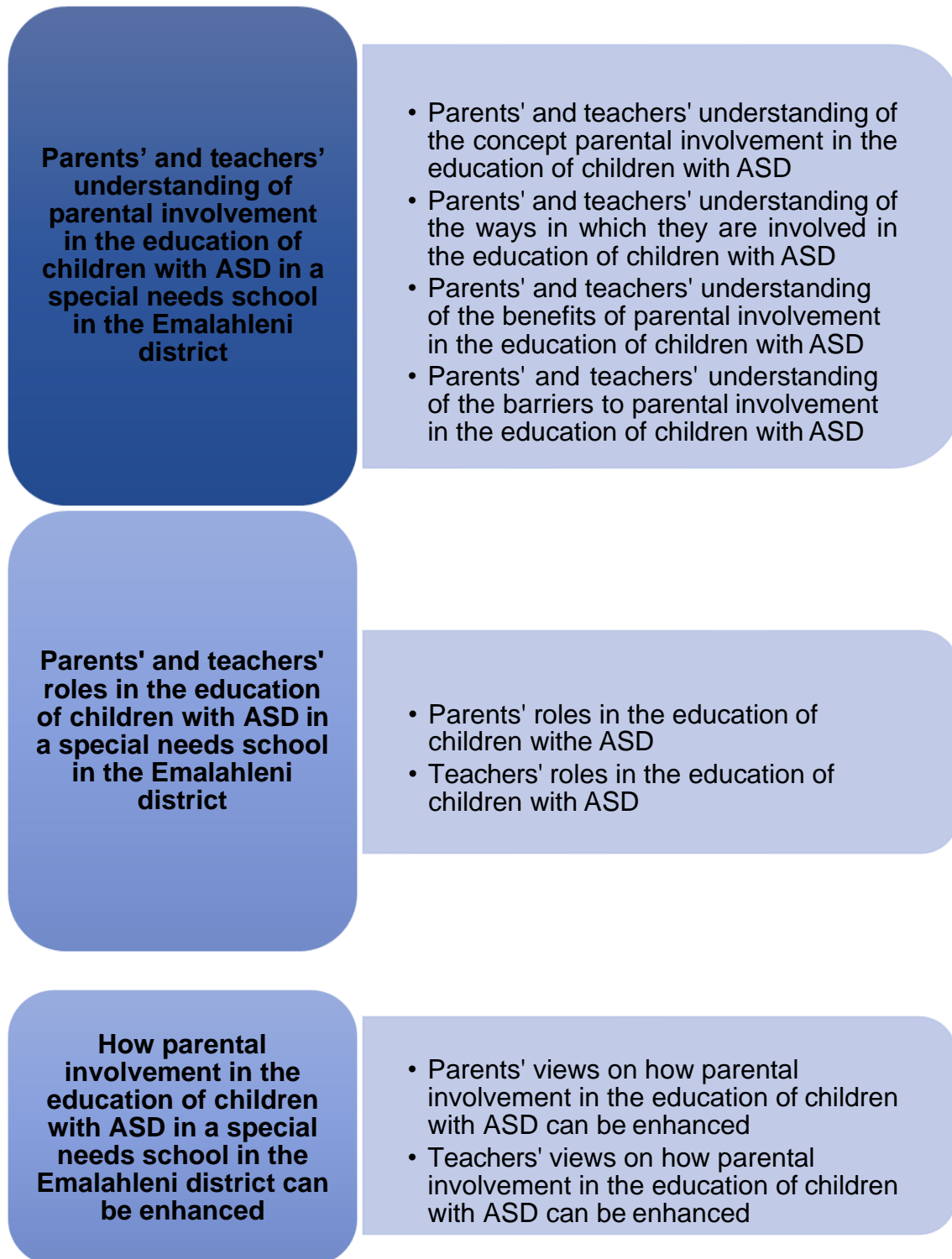
Qualitative data analysis is the process of making sense from the participants' views and opinions of situations (Vosloo, 2014). Furthermore, McMillan and Schumacher (2014) state that qualitative data analysis is an inductive process that entails organising the data that were collected into categories, identifying patterns and establishing



relationships between the categories. The researcher adopted a model from Creswell (2014) to analyse the data qualitatively. The steps are:

- After the data was collected, the researcher ensured that the data were systematic and organised to locate information easily.
- The researcher then started to transcribe the data that was reproduced in text from the taped interviews and documents and then divided it into smaller meaningful units.
- All the data were read thoroughly several times to get an idea of what they contained and during this process, the researcher identified certain themes and classified the data accordingly.
- Finally, the researcher integrated and summarised the data.

The themes, as well as the subthemes, were presented logically under the research questions they were meant to answer. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes identified by the researcher. The themes and sub-themes subsequently assisted the researcher in addressing the research questions.



**Figure 4.1: Themes and sub-themes identified**

#### **4.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN A SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL IN THE EMALAHLENI DISTRICT?**

The participants were asked what the term “parental involvement” means. The responses of the participants will be discussed and be compared with previous literature conducted.

##### **4.3.1 Parents' understanding of the concept of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

All the parents (n=4) regarded the concept of ‘parental involvement’ entails them being involved in every aspect of their children’s education. All the participants (n=4) are involved in their children’s education and considered their involvement as crucial. The researcher learned a great deal about the parents’ attitude regarding parental involvement in their child’s education. This is supported by the statements of the participants.

Parent 1 shared the following about parent involvement:

*“Parents should participate in activities with their children or go to school and have activities there.”*

Parent 2 described parent involvement as follows:

*“You must be involved all the time. Um, you must put your handle on it, especially what the, what the um teacher is doing, every day. You must know exactly what is the programme, what is the plan and, um, yeah, you must keep track and not, not losing track of, of what’s happening daily with him.”*

According to Parent 3:

*“It’s probably the involvement of the father and the mother, involvement with your*

*child.”*

In the opinion of Parent 4:

*“To be part of all the aspects of his development and his life in general.”*

Parents in this current study stated that parental involvement entails being involved and participating in their children’s education. The results from this study correspond with a study conducted by Chowa, Ansong and Osei-Akoto (2012) in Ghana, in 100 schools. Chowa et al. (2012) investigated the parental involvement and academic performance of their children and found that only one measure of parental involvement - talking to children about what they learn in school - is associated significantly and positively with academic performance. Furthermore, it is important that parents should not only be involved in one aspect of their child’s education but also in different aspects, which include field trips, parents’ meetings, homework, sport and other events. In a study conducted by Erlendsdóttir (2010) at a school in Windhoek in Namibia, it was recognised that the parents were aware of the importance of their involvement in their children’s education and its importance for their children’s academic achieved when they stayed involved. The parents of children with ASD or other special needs should be involved closely with their children’s teacher to stay updated on their child’s progress and to assist where needed. The findings are in agreement with Epstein’s theory of parental involvement on which this study was based. Epstein explained that parenting activities increase families’ understanding of their children’s growth and development. These activities may assist parents with information on children’s health, safety, nutrition, other topics of child and adolescent development, and home conditions that support students’ education at each grade level (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis, 2002).

#### **4.3.2 Teachers' understanding of the concept of 'parental involvement' in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the teachers (n=3) regarded the concept of 'parental involvement' of concern for parents. Only one teacher mentioned that parental involvement is a collaborative process between the parents and the school. The teachers gave more precedence to the matter of effective communication between the parents, teachers and the school. Teachers stated that parental involvement has to do with homework, classwork, school activities and daily activities with which parents should be involved. From the teachers' perspective, if parents were more involved in their jobs as teachers, it would be easier as children would show more progress in their education. Teacher 1 mentioned the following:

*"Like a hundred percent involved in the kids' education, because some of the parents that I've encountered personally, the kids are basically just here at school just to be here at school. It's more a case of to get them like off their hands if I shall say . . . so if I would say if parents could be more involved regarding homework, classwork, knowing what's going on in class, and work as, as, as one with the teacher. I think we will achieve great . . . goals when it comes to the kids but at this point in time the lack of . . . parent involvement in schools that is a great deal.*

*That they're involved. Number one, the concern that what is going on in class, what is happening, they are showing interest."*

Echoing the same sentiments, Teacher 2 commented

*"Okay, (laughter) let me put it this way, um it is the parents that have to be involved with their children's comings and goings, for example, their homework, things that happen at school. Um, if we ask for money or something to buy for the child. It is actually a broad spectrum. Parents' involvement plays a big role in the children because if they are not involved with things, then we can't really do more*

*than what they expect of us, so involvement is really very important in education, schoolwork, etc.”*

Teacher 4 stated that she sees parental involvement as a situation where parents are actively involved in their children’s daily activities and their education.

*“Um, obviously parents have to come to school for you as the teacher to um see if they’ve actively participated in their child’s education and as well in their child’s lives.”*

Teachers in this study reported that parents should be involved in their children’s education. The results from this study correspond with a study conducted by Haung (2013) in Prague, in the Czech Republic. The study was conducted with teachers in a mainstream primary school attended by learners with ASD. Huang (2013) found that teachers were of the opinion that parents should be involved in their child’s education more specifically their homework, school activities and also in the classroom. The study by Huang (2013) also reported that parents of children with ASD were involved in their children’s education and lives and were able to shape their daily routines by being involved (Huang, 2013). Furthermore, the results of the study also concur with Epstein’s theory of parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2002). The first type of parental involvement mentioned in Epstein’s theory is *parenting* (Epstein et al., 2002). This level focuses on assisting parents to understand their role in parental involvement as well as assisting teachers to promote parental involvement among parents (Epstein et al., 2002). It is important for teachers to understand the families in order for them to support the parents in the parental involvement process as well (Price-Mitchell, 2013).

The existing literature indicates that for parental involvement to be successful, it is important that both teachers and parents should be involved in the education of children with ASD (Price-Mitchell, 2013). Research has found that there are many potential benefits to parental involvement that include academic success and more engagement in school (Gonzales, 2010). It is therefore important for the teachers and the parents to work together to promote the academic success of their children.

#### **4.3.3. Parents' understanding of the ways in which they are involved in the education of children with ASD**

Responses by parents regarding ways in which they are involved in the education of their children with ASD, revealed the ways in which parents are involved. Parent 1 shared that her child's teacher supports her by helping her child with his homework. The teacher explains the homework to her and then she goes home and helps her son the way the teacher explained. Parent 2 mentioned that her child cannot write or talk, so he does not really receive homework, but when he does, his father assists him. Parent 3 helps his child with homework, and Parent 4 indicated either his mother or father assists with homework, depending on who is available.

The parents were asked if they attended parents' meetings at the school. Both Parents 1 and 3 replied that they do not attend these parents' meetings due to circumstances. Parents 2 and 4 stated that they attend the parents' meetings at the school, but that the meetings are very general. The school does not offer any opportunities for parents to become involved.

The parents in this study revealed that they are involved by helping their children with homework and some of the parents are attending the parent meetings at the school. The findings of this study correspond with a study conducted by Compton (2016) in Minnesota at an elementary school using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study, that indicated when parents assisted their children with their homework it made a positive impact on the learner's academic achievement, although parents often need assistance with ways of helping their children with homework.

Apart from the interviews, the researcher also analysed documents to find out how involved parents are in their children's education. When reviewing the learner's homework books, it was clear that the parents are doing their best to help their children with their homework. Parents signed the homework books to indicate that they are looking at the learners' homework books. Furthermore, the parents reported in their interviews that they check their children's homework books daily to see what homework

should be done and then help their children with the homework. The findings from our study are in agreement with a study conducted by Dawson (2010) in Bethesda, Maryland in the United States who found that parents check their children's homework books regularly and ensured that they complete their homework on time because it enables them to be involved in their child's education.

Furthermore, after analysing and reading the attendance register of the parents' evening, it became clear that there are not many parents that are attending the parents' evenings. This may either be due to the fact that parents work long hours or that they do not show any interest. The results of the current study are not in agreement with a study conducted by Nazzal (2015) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) who found that parents take the parents' meetings seriously and that they have 95% attendance. Therefore, it is evident that the current school where the research was conducted should aim to increase the attendance of parents at their parent meetings.

#### **4.3.4. Teachers' understanding of the ways in which they are involved in the education of children with ASD**

Responses by teachers regarding the ways in which they are involved in the education of children with ASD indicated that they are aware of the ways in which they have to be involved in the education of children with ASD. Teacher involvement activities mentioned the most were school-based, rather than home-based. These were identifying barriers to learning and referring learners to the necessary stakeholders. The importance of identifying barriers to learning and referrals was echoed by most of the teachers.

According to Teacher 1:

*“What we do when we do encounter um a child with autism or special needs, right, then we normally let the child come for a week and then we assess the child for the whole week. Write down all the challenges that we faced and that we refer him to a doctor where maybe you can consult and then the doctor can then*



*give you proper diagnoses of what the child is battling with or the challenges that the child is faced with. That's how we work."*

Teacher 2 noted the following:

*"If we suspect the child has a problem, the principal refers to the child to someone in Pretoria. Every child gets referred to her. She evaluates the child and she gives a programme for the child. Every child gets his or her own programme. At the end of the day, the principal and I work out our own programme and we work with that. Unless the parent insists that the just stays on the suggested programme. We see very quickly if the child has mastered the programme and then we make the worksheets more difficult."*

Teacher 3 commented:

*"I mean we have a lot of children who have speech problems and then they need to be referred to a speech therapist."*

*Obviously when there is a problem or if there is a learner with special needs, we give advice to parents on what to do, but it's because it depends on what's wrong. You will invite them for an interview to see them, over the phone, and then whatever the problem is, the child should be referred."*

In the opinion of Teacher 4:

*"Um, you as the teacher, also have to um identify the barriers um to the learning, as early as possible so that you can take the next steps in working on a plan to help your learners."*

*The child is evaluated by the teacher, so the teacher is um, definitely qualified in the field she has to work in, um, she acknowledges the barriers so she identifies*

*it, um, uh she gets um . . . support form um the school uh by having parent meetings um she also refers the learners with barriers. The school also then, if barriers are identified and the parents are, um, uh phoned, they, then they suggest therapists and um maybe let's say um special action plan for the specific child.*

*How, how, you are going to assist them, um do they need more support in their um schoolwork or daily activities or gross-motor skills. Um, so I think um it's very important um for a teacher to be qualified in um when working with learners with barriers."*

The findings of this current study stated that the teachers evaluate the learner to determine if there are any barriers that the child may experience. If the teacher suspects that there may be barriers, the parents are informed, and the child is referred to a doctor or another professional that is qualified in this specific field. Should the child then be diagnosed with ASD, the child will receive a programme according to which the teacher then works. The greatest impact on the outcome will come from careful attention to parents' concerns, observing early social and communication skills, immediate referral to the available intervention services, and timely referrals for specialised assessments and interventions (Anagnosto et al., 2014). Parent are more willing to be active in their child's education, when their children are struggling with their school work, due to learning difficulties (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

In a study conducted by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2018), it was apparent that parents lacked clarity on how to access referral pathways to healthcare for their children. At the school level, education service providers should have basic knowledge of ASD, not only to manage challenging behaviours but to identify children with ASD (Ruparelia et al., 2016). If the parents suspect that their child might have ASD or you think there could be a problem with the way your child plays, learns, speaks, or acts, contact your child's doctor, and share your concerns. If you or the doctor are still concerned, ask the doctor for a referral to a specialist who can do a more in-depth

evaluation of your child (Lombard, 2014). The findings of this current study confirm Lombard's (2014) statement that a child should be referred to when the school suspects that the child may have ASD. A doctor should be contacted, or parents need to seek professional advice. When parents receive the diagnosis that their child has ASD, they may be in denial. A brief screening tool that is general with specific ASD indicators should be used in schools (Ruparelia et al., 2016). The findings of this current study correspond with Wilford (2013), namely that South Africa does not have access to the necessary services associated with ASD nor do they have the resources to have assessments done on their children (Wilford, 2013). According to the above-mentioned literature, service providers should have basic knowledge both of ASD as well as how to identify barriers. The limited number of service providers influence referrals and intervention or support programmes negatively.

#### **4.3.5 Parents' understanding of the benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the parents (n=3) in the study reported that it is beneficial for them to be involved in their children's education. Most parents were of the opinion that the more they are involved in their children's education, the better they will understand what is expected of them as parents to assist their children and to keep their children positive. Parent 1 indicated that she thinks that there are benefits to parental involvement but did not elaborate.

Parent 2 mentioned:

*"Of course, yeah. Jislaaik if you just, just um, do what you want and not worry about him, nothings gonna happen to him one day so yeah um. You must be involved all the time. (Silence). If everything, everything."*

Parent 3 responded:

*"To be involved? Yes, a lot. Yes, I can help him with a lot of things educational. I can help him a lot."*

Parent 4 expressed the following view:

*“Yes, I definitely think so. I think it keeps my child positive (Silence) parents can also assist to inform the teacher regarding behaviour and other things that happened with the child at home.”*

In the current study, parents were of the opinion that there are benefits to being involved in the education of their child. However, the parents did not elaborate much on the specific benefits of parental involvement. Our results are in agreement with a study conducted by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) in New Zealand at a school, where they found that parental involvement has numerous benefits, such as improving academic achievement, social functioning, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems. In another study by Olsen and Fuller (2017) parents in North Dakota showed better sensitivity and responsiveness to their children’s emotional, social, intellectual, and developmental needs when they were more involved with their children. Furthermore, parents who are more involved in their children’s education are able to understand the role of the teacher better (Olsen & Fuller, 2017). Therefore, it is evident that there are many benefits to parental involvement in the education of children (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, Olsen & Fuller, 2017). In a study done by Michael et al. (2012) in South Africa, the research revealed that the benefits of parental involvement include improved parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate, improved mental health of learners, increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in the education of their children, developing a sense of ownership and pride in the school, reduction in costs, parent awareness of school matters, and a sense of community is created. The findings of this study correspond with those of Hornby & Lafaele (2011) and Michael et al. (2012). Epstein revealed that when students see that their parents and teachers are in contact, they become aware that they can talk to someone at home about schoolwork and school decisions (Epstein et al., 2002).

#### **4.3.6 Teachers' understanding of the benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the teachers (n=3) in the study reported that it is beneficial for parents to be involved in their children's education. The teachers expressed their opinion by saying that the more parents are involved in their children's education the better the academic performance and development of their children. Teacher 2 said the following about the benefits of parental involvement:

*“On my side definitely a lot, um, there are a lot of parents that are very involved. There are at least parents who come in at least once a week to ask how the children are doing, and this makes a difference in the child's education as it improved their academic performance.”*

Another teacher (Teacher 3) reported on how involved a parent was in their child therapy services. The teacher had the following to say about the parent's involvement:

*“Um, a child had a speech impairment. That mother did everything in her power to help that child. She brought him into school a little later, then he first went to a speech therapist, [also] he went to an occupational therapist. A year later, the child was discharged from therapy just because the mother was so committed...involved in the child's therapy.”*

Teachers in this study reported that parents should be involved in their children's education as well as therapy services. Parental involvement benefits learners' academic outcomes that include learners' academic achievement and performance, and aspirations, but also non-academic outcomes which involve attendance, behaviour, development, attitude, homework, self-esteem, motivation, and self-discipline (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Manilal, 2014). Other benefits of parental involvement include improved parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate, the improved mental health of learners, increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in the education of their children, developing a sense of ownership and pride in the school, reduction in costs, parent awareness of school matters, and building a sense of

community (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Michael et al., 2012). The findings of the current study, therefore, correspond with previous literature regarding the benefits of parental involvement in the education of learners (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Michael et al., 2012). Furthermore, the results of the study also concur with Epstein's theory of parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2002). The fourth type of parental involvement in Epstein's theory is 'learning at home' (Epstein et al., 2002). This level focuses on involving parents with regard to their children in academic and non-academic activities in order for them to learn at home (Epstein et al., 2002). It is evident that there are many benefits to parental involvement and, therefore, teachers should promote parental involvement amongst the parents of children with ASD.

#### **4.3.7 Parents' understanding of the barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

Responses from the parents (n=4) indicated that there were many barriers to parental involvement. Parent 1 mentioned that she did not have any reasons why she is not involved in her child's education. Parent 2 expressed her frustration with the fact that her child is sixteen and cannot speak. She explained that because she is a working parent, she needs the school's help, even though she tries to be involved as much as she can. The following is an excerpt from the interview with her:

*"He's sixteen, and he cannot talk, but he can um, he understands most of the stuff, you, you, you um, you tell him to do, like basic house stuff. He knows that very well, um, but yeah, I think, I think we need some help*

*Some people don't even know what autism is.*

*I'm a parent that works. I'm a, I'm not a parent that sits at home, um I'm working and so um, I try to be involved as much as I can, but I also need to work, because, um, um to put your child in an autistic school is not cheap. It's not, it's quite expensive, so you want the best, but you don't always get the best."*

Parent 3 felt the following is a challenge:

*“Mine are shifts, but yeah, on the other hand, my shifts work, because I can help so ag it’s, it’s yeah, it’s bad on the one hand, but good on the other hand.”*

In the opinion of Parent 4:

*“it’s very difficult sometimes, with, with, with our child, to uh to, to, to, to see to it that he adapts to other children. Sometimes it’s very difficult um he also has some moods and then it’s difficult to, to mix with other children.”*

The results of this current study reveal that some of the parents cannot visit their children’s schools as often as they would like to because of their work circumstances. There are parents who work long hours and it is not always possible for them to get the time off to visit their children’s schools. One of the participants stated that when her child experiences problems, then she goes to the school and speaks to the teacher face -to- face. The findings of this study correspond with those of Okeke (2014), namely, that parents’ non-involvement is not necessarily due to a lack of involvement (Karst, Hecke, Carson, Stevens, Schohl & Dolan, 2015) found that raising a child with ASD is associated with elevated levels of chaos and stress. Huang (2013) also found that parents face different problems when dealing with emotional and practical difficulties when it comes to their child with ASD. Research that was conducted in the United Kingdom in the London area of England by Okeke (2014) in a primary school, suggests that it is not necessarily the lack of interest that prevents parents from becoming involved, but rather barriers that include poverty, the effects of the HIV/Aids pandemic, non-English literacy, single-parenthood and cultural and socioeconomic isolation. Parents who are among the poorest sections of society face a difficult struggle to survive, they live in inadequate housing, work unusual hours, are badly paid or are unemployed (Okeke, 2014). Some parents do not have easy access to transport as they live a great distance away from the school; thus, they cannot visit the school on a regular basis (Michael et al., 2012).

#### **4.3.8 Teachers' understanding of the barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD.**

Responses from the teachers (n=4) indicated that there were many barriers to parental involvement. Teacher 1 expressed her frustration that parents are in denial about their children having ASD. She explained that because parents are in denial, they tend to be uninvolved in their children's education. The following is an excerpt from the interview with her:

*"You must remember most parents don't even know that, that sometimes their kids are autistic or have special needs, because a lot of parents are so in denial, but hence you are bringing them to a special needs school and the, ugh, the most, the thing that we always, always encounter is parents that, that are in denial and that is the most saddest thing.*

*I will say denial, denial number one and number two they are so scared like they, they've put their child in, in, in this school, so I will avoid any contact or any um involvement, eish, because I'm so scared they're gonna tell me: "I must take my child out of school.*

*That is what we are faced with big time, and that's number one because they don't want to accept the fact that there is anything wrong."*

Another teacher (Teacher 2) reported that poor communication between the school, teachers and parents is also another barrier to parental involvement. She had the following to say:

*"You know in most cases it is a matter of um . . . None of us knows what's going on in a child home environment, not at all. I won't know. It's one of those things. There is not always co-operation, there is no interest in some cases. And that makes you sad. There is no involvement in their child's education."*



Teachers 3 and 4 referred to time being another barrier to parental involvement. Teacher 3 described the barrier as follows:

*“I think time plays a big factor, um plays a big role if I can say that. I don’t know. Problems at home cause that parents just give up, that they don’t care. That is what I think, but I think the time is the big evil. When you talk to the parent, the first thing they say is that there is no time. Some parents work until six o’clock. I think that’s the biggest barrier to parental involvement.”*

Teachers in this study stated that there are many barriers to parental involvement, which included parents being in denial about their children having ASD, parents not having enough time to be involved in their children’s education, and the poor communication between parents, teachers and the school. The results from the current study correspond with a study conducted by Savacool (2011) in New York at an upstate child-care centre, this study investigated the barriers to parental involvement in a pre- kindergarten classroom. The findings revealed that both parents and teachers felt that there was never enough time to build a strong relationship due to balancing work, family and other commitments. Furthermore, parents only want what is best for their children but working full-time, and other obligations make involvement in their child’s education challenging.

Furthermore, the findings of the current study are also in agreement with a study conducted by Murphy and Tierney (2010) in the Republic of Ireland who reported that parents do not necessarily have the knowledge to know that their children have ASD or that they are in denial about the diagnosis (Murphey & Tierney, 2010). Lastly, our results concur with a study conducted by Iadarola et al. (2014) in three large, urban school districts in the United States. This study used qualitative methods to evaluate the perceptions of parents, educators, and school administrators regarding services for children with autism spectrum disorder within the context of limited district resources (Iadarola et al., 2014). Their results indicated that poor communication between the school, teacher and parents caused a barrier to parental involvement (Iadarola et al.,

2014). According to Makewa and Role (2012), there are a number of other factors that create barriers to parental involvement these include parents' socioeconomic conditions, parents' occupation, educational attainment, family type, family size, high rates of divorce, lower well-being of the family, parents' mental and physical health, feelings about the school, self-efficacy issues for helping their children to succeed in their schoolwork, the roles they believe they play in motivating their children, language barriers, cultural understanding conflicts, financial and work-related restraints, an atmosphere that is not always welcoming, judgemental attitudes, inconvenient scheduling and a lack of resources in time and money (Bartel, 2010; Horvatin, 2011; Karst & Van Hecke, 2012; Makewa & Role 2012). Limited research has been conducted on the barriers contributing to parental involvement in South Africa (Lemmer, 2007). Therefore, there is a need to investigate the factors contributing to barriers to parental involvement in South Africa further.

#### **4.4. RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' ROLES IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN A SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL IN THE EMALAHLENI DISTRICT?**

The participants were asked what the term "parental involvement" means. The responses of the participants will be discussed and be compared with previous literature conducted.

##### **4.4.1 Parents' roles in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the parents (n=3) responded that the role of the parents in their involvement is important as parents need to be supportive of their children and need to educate their children to be independent. Parent 1 mentioned that she thinks she plays an important role in her child's education.

Parent 2 revealed:

*"I must be there for him hundred, um every day, every second I must be there for him, um, and, yeah, I need to educate him as far as I can and help him as far as I*

*can um and be there for him and educate him till the best of, the best I can. Educate him.”*

Parent 3 mentioned:

*“I have to raise him that he can probably, that he can be independent um, can do his own thing, can make food for himself, and can wash clothes, and can look after himself. What I think.”*

Parent 4 explained:

*“Parents must try to be positive and supportive in all the activities regarding education like support, assist him with the homework, and other activities like sports, etc.”*

The parents in the current study referred to some of the roles they fulfil in the education of their child with ASD. The Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) provides a better explanation of the roles of parents in education (DoE, 2014):

- Parents should take responsibility for the support of their children in the most inclusive way possible.
- Parents should be involved with their learner’s education to understand how the potential of their child can be optimally developed.
- They need access to information to give the learner the support that they need.
- They must know their rights in terms of having access to available support.
- Parents must make every effort to help the learner to get access to an appropriate early-intervention programme which is available in their area.
- If parents suspect that their child has additional support needs, but has not accessed early-intervention programmes prior to the child turning three years

old, they should report to the local ordinary school as early as possible but no later than the age of five years.

- Parents play a meaningful role in forming a partnership with the teacher to ensure that support is implemented that is outlined in the individual support plan.

The findings of the current study are in agreement with the findings of a study conducted by Nene (2016) in KwaZulu Natal at a school in a rural area. Parents' in the study by Nene (2016) believed that their role is to give their special needs children love and support in whatever skill that has been identified by teachers. By playing these roles, parents think that they are contributing a great deal to their children's progress with regard to learning and development (Nene, 2016). It is important for parents to understand their role in the education of their child (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Parents in the current study are not informed about their specific roles in the education of children and should, therefore, receive information and support from the school so that they can fulfil their roles. By being involved in their children's education, parents know how to support and encourage their children at home and parents will understand their children's instructional programme (Epstein et al., 2002).

#### **4.4.2 Teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the teachers responded that the role of the teacher in the involvement of parents is fundamental as the teacher builds a foundation whether it is with regard to discipline, the child's development or constantly motivating a child to give this/her best. Teacher 1 mentioned the following:

*"I'm just gonna put it plain and simple. My role, I would say, is to create, not create, um to how do you say um, okay let me put it this way. To, to , to build or achieve great um, not create students man, like if you see a little child and, and you, you, you, you are the core, it starts with you teaching them, or, or, or, or laying the foundation to maybe becoming a doctor or yeah so that's how I see when it comes to our children. You understand? It starts small, but I just don't*

*know how to put it in that right context (laughter), or word if I should put it that way, but that's where it starts, to build you know."*

Teacher 2 remarked:

*"What is my role? Dear mother. I can praise myself, but I don't like it. In the first place, I am very strict. For me, discipline is priority number one. If a child is autistic or not, but if you walk into my class and I sit in the class and I said sit, be calm, we are going to start working now. Everyone sits still on his chair. There is a discipline that I apply and I apply them to the fullest, and that is what I appreciate. If the parents do that with the children at home."*

Teacher 3 stated:

*"A very big role. Um the children's future is actually in my hands, especially the grade R's, I have the grade R's, and if something goes wrong there, or if a child, I feel if I can't, um, teach a child what needs to be taught, it can be my responsibility or if something goes wrong in their future. That's how I see it. So it is a very big role that I play. As a grade R teacher, I think. Um. It is where they are shaped, their foundation phase."*

Teacher 4 explained:

*"Um, a teacher has a very specific role in teaching learners with, with, um autism. Um, these learners need constant motivation every day, every second of every day. Um, you as the teacher also has to be um positive in everything that you do so that they can um let's say, um perform the best uh that they can, um you also have to give constant appreciation for everything they do. If their activity has been done right or if their activity has been done wrong, you must um say: "Very good my dear, let's try this or let's try that". Um, you as the teacher also has to um identify the barriers um to the learning, as early as possible so that you can take the next steps in working on a plan to help your learners."*

*It's the role of you as a teacher to be constantly involved in the learners' daily activities, um so you have to be actively involved with your learners in your classroom."*

The role of teachers in education is clearly outlined in the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (DoE, 2014). The role of the teachers in education is as follow:

- The teacher's role in an inclusive assessment is crucial. What is really required is a conceptual understanding of inclusion and the diverse needs of learners, including those with disabilities.
- Learning programmes and materials as well as assessment procedures must be made accessible to all learners and must accommodate the diversity of learning needs in order to facilitate learners' achievement to the fullest.
- The learner profile document will serve primarily as a tool for teachers to plan interventions and support on a day-to-day basis as part of the teaching and learning process.
- Teachers must take care not to label learners who are identified for additional support, thereby, promoting exclusionary practices.
- The uncovering of barriers to learning must be based on sound observation, interviews and consultation, reflection, formative actions, previous records, and should also be grounded in the curriculum.
- The support will include the differentiation of content, the adjustment of classroom methodologies and the classroom environment, and applying the necessary accommodation in assessment and examinations.
- The SIAS process clearly outlines how the process of screening, identifying and assessing learners for eligibility to receive additional support in special schools or specialised sites is being replaced by structures that acknowledge the central role played by teachers, school-level support teams and parents (DoE, 2001).
- What is needed is a change in attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and environments to meet the needs of all learners.

Classroom teachers are responsible for each child's progress. Their duties include:

- Evaluating and reporting on students' progress;
- Collaborating with students and their parents to plan, create, and sustain a safe learning environment; planning instruction for the class and for individual student;
- Implementing the goals and objectives of an individual education plan and making revisions as necessary;
- Communicating with parents about their children's education; coordinating and managing information provided by the school-based support team (speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, and social workers) and
- Adapting their teaching styles, activities, and the curriculum to facilitate each student's success (Kulusic, 2014).

Teachers in this study confirmed that their role in the education of children with ASD is extremely important as you as a teacher lay a foundation for the child's future. Some of the results from the current study correspond with the study conducted by Kulusic (2014). This study confirms that learners experience different barriers and have different needs, which means that the teacher must meet this diverse need of the learners. Teachers must plan each child's intervention programme carefully. Learning content should also be differentiated to accommodate all the learners. These results correspond with the roles of teachers outlined in the SIAS document (DoE, 2014). The same learning programme cannot be used for all the learners as they have different needs. The teachers did not elaborate much on their specific roles when working with learners with ASD, although some of the teachers mentioned that when the learners are diagnosed, a programme is created to meet the child's specific needs. Epstein et al. (2002) confirm the important roles teachers play in helping families become involved in schoolwork at home. When teachers frequently use practices to involve families in reading, students gain more in reading than do similar students whose teachers do not involve families (Epstein et al., 2002).

#### **4.5. RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON HOW TO ENHANCE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN A SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL?**

Accordingly, the participants were asked how they think parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced. The participants' responses are explained in the following section.

##### **4.5.1 Parents' views on how parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced**

Parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district should be enhanced through parent and teacher training and information sessions. The parents (n=4) had the following to say on how parental involvement can be enhanced:

Parent 1 explained:

*"They can give more attention to the child. Especially single parents that works long hours and still need to look after that children. Just be a bit more involved."*

In the opinion of Parent 2:

*"In giving us as parents tips how to help our child. You know what um sometimes we need to tell the teachers um how to do certain things and I feel that when you're a teacher of an autistic class you need to up, be up to date of each thing that is happening in autism. You need to be up-to-date."*

*So, we, as parents, need some tips. If your child cannot talk, what can we do to help, to understand him."*

*They must go on courses, the parents, the teachers must go on courses and regular updates, because I know if you go to Autism South Africa Johannesburg,*



*they are so up-to- date with what's happening in um in the autistic world. They know exactly, so, I think, teachers must go on workshops and courses and training and then they can help us as well. Or we must both actually go on, on, on such workshops and courses."*

Parent 3 felt the following way:

*"They must be specialised. You can't just take a woman or a teacher and say: "Teach autistic children." You need to be a specialised teacher, I think, to do that. That's what I would say, um she can be how clever, but she must be able to work with special kids. That's what I think. A man or a woman. It doesn't matter. A teacher, that's what I would say. Yeah, that's what I think."*

Parent 4 posited:

*"I think assistance, like workshops, training and another kind of information will really uh support us, will be supportive, supportive to us."*

It is evident from the findings in the current study that parents have a need for in-depth training on how to assist their child with ASD in the educational context. Parents also expressed their need for support groups where they have the opportunity to meet other parents who also have children with ASD. Our results are in agreement with another study conducted by Hollingworth, Allen, Kuyok, Mansaray and Rose (2009) in London at schools where parents indicated that they require more support either by information sessions, support groups, training and workshops. Furthermore, parental involvement in the education of children with ASD could be enhanced by incorporating parents' needs into school services or connect parents to community resources (Zeman, Swanke & Doktor, 2011). It is, therefore, important for parents to express their needs to the school in order for the school to arrange workshops, courses, support groups and information sessions. This way, parental involvement can be enhanced. Parents in the current study also felt that the teachers should have the necessary knowledge and training to work

with their children and should attend ASD specific training. Therefore, it is important that not only the parents, but also the teachers receiving training on ASD as this might enhance parental involvement. Practices should be selected to meet the needs and interests of the families and students in each school and to help reach the school improvement goals (Epstein et al., 2002).

#### **4.5.2 Teachers' views on how parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced**

All the teachers (n=4) responded that parental support strategies should include information sessions and parents' meetings. Resources should also be established to ensure that parental involvement is enhanced. Teacher 1 expressed the view that workshops can provide parents with more information and also educate parents. Teacher 2 did not mention anything about training and information sessions.

According to Teacher 3:

*"The headmaster invited parents and did a talk about autism. She explained what it is and where it comes from and gives them advice and guidance. I feel you hold, if you hold something like that at a school it will also help to become involved*

*Because children are different from normal children, so we have to train the parents."*

In the opinion of Teacher 4:

*"Um, if parents can be educated um let's say through parent meetings or group sessions or um therapeutic seminars um support groups maybe, will be a good idea um where they can talk to each other on how do they handle their child if this happens or what they can do if that happens.*

*Um, I think if there are more workshop and group interaction sessions where the parents can discuss um the grade of autism their child has, um support groups, for teachers, um because maybe I have an idea and you don't have the same one, then we can share. Um, information sessions, um and booklets, um yeah."*

The findings of this study do not correspond with the existing literature. (Bartel, 2010; Huang, 2013). The participating school in this study does not provide information sessions, workshops, seminars, or courses related to ASD. The school only has an information evening at the beginning of the year to introduce new teachers and parents. Some of the teachers mentioned that workshops and information sessions may help parents and teachers to work together to enhance parental involvement. In a study conducted by Bartel (2010) in the United States, Elementary school revealed that families should be provided with information or training on how to develop home conditions or environments that support learning. Schools should develop a plan and programme for family and community involvement (Bartel, 2010). It is, therefore, important to ensure that school principals keep up-to-date and remain motivated regarding the training of relevant, inclusive education teachers' use of a specific screening tool and standardised diagnostic measures so that this improvement in the early diagnosis of ASD is sustained (Oosterling et al., 2010). Training can help educators to take the individual needs of a child with ASD into account, to address the negative attitudes and bullying of those with ASD in the school environment (Ruparelia et al., 2016). Parents who attend ASD training and information sessions are able to understand ASD better and provide support to their children (Huang, 2013). Dameh (2015) has revealed in her research that the district organises a parents' academy a few times during the year where they focus on specific topics to help the parents. The Parent Academy is a free, year-round, parent engagement initiative helping parents become full partners in their children's education (The Parent Academy, 2019). In accordance with Epstein's theory of parental involvement on which this study was based, parents can become volunteers at their children's school. Volunteering activities enable families to share their time and talents to support the school, teachers, and

students. Families also give their time to attend students' performances, sports activities, assemblies, celebrations, and other events (Epstein et al., 2002).

The participants were asked which resources would make the biggest difference in increasing parental involvement. Some of the teachers mentioned that the school should collaborate with a speech therapist and also arrange for information sessions to help parents to become more involved.

Teacher 1 shared the following regarding resources:

*"We came together in a meeting, and they actually asked us, couldn't we um form like an SGB that you get at a normal school, like parents governing body kind of thing where the parents can actually come to school and we all sit together."*

According to Teacher 2, there is a need for more speech-language therapy services.

Teacher 3 mentioned:

*"We had a speech therapist who came to school and then they will tell us, the teachers, what to do. Let's say, I had a question about a child with special needs who can't speak, how do you assess such a child? Then the speech therapist would come here to school."*

Teacher 4 suggested the following:

*"Um, I think if, if, if a school maybe can have um, let's say a part of the library with um autistic books, maybe that they, the parents can borrow or they have uh research sites, websites where they can maybe get un ideas or new techniques on how to handle their child with um, autism."*

*Um, I think if there's more workshops and group interaction sessions where the parents can discuss um the grade of autism their child has, um support groups, for teachers, um because maybe I have an idea and you don't have the same one, then we can share. Um, information sessions, um and booklets, um yeah."*

The findings of the current study revealed that there is a need for a SGB and there is a need for more speech-language therapy services. Two of the participants of this current study mentioned that the school previously made use of a speech therapist. Another participant recommended a library where the parents could find all the necessary information regarding ASD. The findings of this study indicate that the schools do not have the necessary resources that they should have and that there is a need for resources to be put in place to enhance learners' education. It was obvious that access to resources in terms of clinician expertise and assessments, were not evenly weighted (Wilford, 2013). In South Africa, there are minimal provisions for screening, diagnosis and intervention strategies for ASD children (Wilford, 2013). In a South African case study undertaken by Michael et al. (2012) on the management of parental involvement in multicultural schools in South Africa research shows that there is a lack of a written formal policy on parental involvement at all three schools where his research was conducted. When comparing the above-mentioned literature with the findings of this study, the researcher assumes that the lack of resources is a general problem. The findings of this study are in agreement with Epstein's theory of parental involvement on which this study was based. Epstein et al. (2002) posits that decision-making activities enable families to participate in decisions about school programmes that affect their own and other children. Family representatives on school councils, school improvement teams, and various committees and in parent-teachers' association, parent teachers' organisation, or other parent organisations ensure that parents' voices are heard on important school decisions.

## **4.6 CONCLUSION**

In Chapter 4, the researcher presented the results of the study in terms of the themes and their related sub-themes. The themes included parents' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement, parents' and teachers' roles and the enhancement of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district. The sub-themes included parents' and teachers' understanding of the concept of parental involvement and ways in which they were involved; the benefits and barriers to parent involvement; the roles that parents and teachers play; and the views of parents and teachers on how to enhance parent involvement. The next and final chapter will focus on the summary of the findings of the research questions, a critical evaluation of the study, recommendations for future research and general conclusions.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHAPTER 5</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>
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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this master's research project was to explore how involved parents and teachers are in the education of learners with ASD in a school for special educational needs in Emalahleni. This was achieved through the following sub-aims: 1) exploring parents' and teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district; 2) describing parents' and teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD in a special needs school in the Emalahleni district; 3) explaining parents' and teachers' views on how parental involvement in the education of their children with ASD can be enhanced. Limited research is available on the parental involvement of parents of children with ASD in South Africa (Lemmer, 2007). It is important to document the involvement of parents of children with ASD as previous research concluded that there are a number of benefits to parents and teachers being involved in the education of children with ASD (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Manilal, 2014).

The major findings of this current study are summarised in this chapter. The theoretical and practical implications are represented and will be compared to recent literature to reflect the significance of the study. The researcher will describe the contribution of the study to the field of ASD research and education in SA and possibly in a broader context. Lastly, the research will be evaluated critically, and a final conclusion is drawn.

The major findings and the implications of the study will be discussed next.

### **5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN A SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL IN THE EMALAHLENI DISTRICT?**

The participants were asked what the term “parental involvement” means. The responses of the participants will be discussed and will be compared with previous literature conducted.

### **5.2.1 Parents’ and teachers’ understanding of the concept parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

In this section, the researcher presents the findings that were obtained with regard to parents’ and teachers’ understanding of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. The researcher compared the finding to existing literature in order to answer research question 1.

#### ***5.2.1.1 Parents’ understanding of the concept ‘parental involvement’ in the education of children with ASD***

Most of the parents regarded the concept of ‘parental involvement’ as them being involved in every aspect of their children’s education. All the participants are involved in their children’s education and considered their involvement as crucial. The researcher learned a great deal about the parents’ attitudes regarding parental involvement in their children’s education. Parents in this current study reported that parental involvement means being involved and participating in their children’s education. It is important that parents should not only be involved in one aspect of their children’s education, but in different aspects which include field trips, parents’ meetings, homework, sport and other events (Chowa et al., 2012). As described in section 1.3, Epstein’s theory of parental involvement emphasises the six important aspects for parental involvement. Epstein explained that parenting activities increase families’ understanding of their children’s growth and development. These activities may assist parents with information on children’s health, safety, nutrition, other topics of child and adolescent development, and home conditions that support students’ education at each grade level (Epstein et al., 2002). As mentioned by Epstein, the parent should also provide the teachers with information regarding the child’s background to enable the teacher to understand the child better.



### ***5.2.1.2 Teachers' understanding of the concept 'parental involvement' in the education of children with ASD***

Most of the teachers regarded the concept of 'parental involvement' as the parents' concern. The teachers gave more precedence to the matter of effective communication between the parents, teachers and the school. Teachers referred more to activities such as engaging in homework, classwork, school activities and daily activities. Teachers in this study reported that parents should be more involved in their children's education. Research has found that there are many potential benefits to parental involvement, which include academic success and more engagement in school, for example, (Gonzales, 2010). It is, therefore, important for the parents and the teachers to work together to promote academic success.

Furthermore, there is a need to view parental involvement more holistically by using Epstein's theory of parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2002). The first type of parental involvement mentioned in Epstein's theory is 'parenting,' which focuses on assisting parents to understand their role in parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2002). It is, therefore, important for teachers to understand families in order for them to support the parents in the parental involvement process as well (Price-Mitchell, 2013).

### ***5.2.2 Parents' and teachers' understanding of the ways in which they are involved in the education of children with ASD***

In this section, the researcher discusses and compares the ways in which parents and teachers are involved in the education of children with ASD, as indicated by previous literature conducted and the findings of this study. After the findings are presented, the research question one will be addressed.

#### ***5.2.2.1 Parents' understanding of the ways in which they are involved in the education of children with ASD***

Responses by parents regarding the ways in which they are involved in the education of their children with ASD, revealed the ways in which parents are involved. Parent 1 shared that her child's teacher supports her by helping her child with his homework. The teacher would explain the homework to her and then she would go home and help her

son in accordance with how the teacher had explained it should be done. Parent 2 mentioned that her child cannot write or talk, so he does not really get homework, but when he does, his father assists him. Parent 3 helps his child with homework, and Parent 4 replied that either his mother or father assists with the homework, depending on who is available.

When parents assisted their children with their homework, it had a positive impact on the learners' academic achievement, although parents often need assistance with helping their children with homework (Compton, 2016). Parent meetings in the evening provide opportunities for parents to be more involved and to stay involved in the education of their children (Jooste, 2011).

The schools have a good communication system, but parents do not always respond. The teachers experience that the parents do not help their children with homework, but the parents feel that the schools should provide them with guidelines on how to help their children at home with homework. The schools have parents' meetings, but most of the parents do not attend the parent's meetings. The second type of parental involvement mentioned in Epstein's theory is 'communicating' which focuses on the various ways to communicate with parents, for example, parent-teacher meeting, homework books, parent letters, emails, phone calls, notes, and online platforms for student engagement (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

#### ***5.2.2.2 Teachers' understanding of the ways in which they are involved in the education of children with ASD***

Responses by teachers regarding the ways in which they are involved in the education of children with ASD indicated that they were familiar with the ways in which they have to be involved in the education of their children with ASD. Teacher involvement activities that were mentioned the most were school-based, rather than home-based. These were identifying barriers to learning and referring learners to the necessary stakeholders. The importance of identifying barriers to learning and referrals was echoed by most of the teachers. The findings of this current study stated that the teachers evaluate the learner

to determine if there are any barriers that the child may experience. If the teacher suspects that there may be barriers, the parents are informed, and the child is referred to a doctor or another professional that is qualified in this specific field. Should the child then be diagnosed with ASD, the child will receive a programme according to which the teacher then works. Parents are more willing to be active in their child education, when their children are struggling with their schoolwork, due to learning difficulties (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Communication between the home and the school should be two-way communication. The school make use written communication such as communication books, and homework books; as well as social media and emails. When using different methods of communication, parents and teachers will make effective partners for the benefit of the child (Alfonzo-Reyes, 2012). The school have parents' meetings, but most of the parents do not attend the parent's meetings. The teachers feel that these meetings are important, and parents have to attend the meetings. If the parents do not attend the parents' meetings, they will not know what areas their child is struggling with, and they will not be able to help their child. Epstein (2010) agrees that conferences should be held at least once a year with each parent, with follow-ups as needed. Therefore, it is important for the school to organise the meetings and ensure that parents attend. As described in section 1.3, teachers should provide parents with the necessary skills to understand the child and the child's development.

### **5.2.3 Parents' and teachers' understanding of the benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

In this section, the parents' and teachers' understanding of the benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD will be presented, discussed and be compared with the existing literature.

#### ***5.2.3.1 Parents' understanding of the benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD***

Most of the parents in the study reported that it is beneficial for them to be involved in their children's education. Most parents were of the opinion that the more they are involved in their children's education the better they will understand what is expected from them as parents to assist their children and to keep their children positive. In the current study, parents were of the opinion that there are benefits to being involved in the education of their children. However, the parents did not elaborate much on the specific benefits of parental involvement. Parents who are more involved in their children's education are able to understand the role of the teacher better (Olsen & Fuller, 2017). Research revealed that benefits of parental involvement include improved parent- teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate, improved mental health of learners, increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in the education of their children, developing a sense of ownership and pride in the school, reduction in costs, parent awareness of school matters, and building a sense of community (Michael et al., 2012). Parenting activities increase parents' understanding of the growth and development of their child, and these activities may help parents with information on the health, nutrition and safety of the child (Epstein et al., 2002).

#### ***5.2.3.2 Teachers' understanding of the benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with ASD***

Most of the teachers in the study reported that it is beneficial for parents to be involved in their children's education. Teachers expressed their opinion that the more parents are involved in their children's education the better the academic performance and development of their child. Teachers in this study reported that parents should be involved in their children's education as well as therapy services. One benefit of parental involvement is the relationship between the teacher and the parent. The parent has to go to the child school to build a relationship. Another benefit is to provide feedback to the parent in order for them to know what is going on in the children's schooling. Other benefits may include improved parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate, improved mental health of learners, increased parental

confidence, satisfaction and interest in the education of their children, developing a sense of ownership and pride in the school, reduction in costs, parent awareness of school matters, and building a sense of community (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Michael et al., 2012). The findings of the current study, therefore, correspond with previous literature regarding the benefits of parental involvement in the education of learners (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Michael et al., 2012). Furthermore, the results of the study also concur with Epstein's theory on parental involvement as teachers can help parents to understand the child and assist them with support in parenting skills. (Epstein & Salinas 2004). Teachers can help parents to understand the child's development. This may help to establish a supportive academically-friendly environment at home for their children (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Okeke, 2014).

#### **5.2.4 Parents' and teachers' understanding of the barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

In this section, the parents' and teachers' understanding of the barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD, will be presented and compared to the literature studied previously.

##### ***5.2.4.1 Parents' understanding of the barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD***

Responses from the parents indicated that there were many barriers to parental involvement. There are parents who work long hours and it is not always possible for them to get the time off to visit their child's school. Parents who are among the poorest sections of society engaged in a difficult struggle to survive, they live in inadequate housing, work unusual hours, are badly paid or are unemployed (Okeke, 2014). Some parents do not have transport that is easily available to them as they live a great distance away from the school. thus, they cannot visit the school on a regular basis (Michael et al., 2012). Huang (2013) found that parents face different problems with regard to dealing with emotional and practical difficulties when it comes to their child with ASD.

According to the teachers, some parents do not realise that their child has ASD and then some parents struggle to accept the diagnoses. The parents feel that the school should guide and support them to take the next step. The teachers do not know what is going on in the child's home-life and it makes it difficult to understand the challenges and barriers that the parents face that cause them not to attend their children's school.

#### ***5.2.4.2 Teachers' understanding of the barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with ASD***

Responses from the teachers indicated that there were many barriers to parental involvement. Teacher 1 expressed her frustration that parents are in denial about their children having ASD. She explained that because parents are in denial, they tend to be uninvolved in their child's education. Teachers in this study stated that there are many barriers to parental involvement, which included parents being in denial about their children's having ASD, parents not having enough time to be involved in their children's education, and the failure to communicate between parents, the teachers and the school. The research found that both parents and teachers felt that there was never enough time to build a strong relationship due to balancing work, family and other commitments (Savacool, 2011). Parents only want what is best for their children but working a full-time job, and other obligations make involvement in their children's education challenging (Savacool, 2011). Some parents do not realise that their children are autistic, other parents are in denial and struggle to accept the diagnoses, some parents do not have the time to go to their children's schools. The teachers do not know what is going on in the children's home-life and it makes it difficult to understand the challenges and barriers that the parents face that prevent them from attending their children's schools. The parents of children with ASD do not necessarily have the knowledge regarding how to help their children (Murphy & Tierney, 2010). Parental involvement can be affected by several factors, which include parents' socioeconomic conditions, parents' occupation, educational attainment, family type and family size (Makewa & Role, 2012). Even though it is sometimes difficult for parents to accept that their child is struggling, they need to be open-minded with regard to the possibility in order for them to offer support to their child to receive the necessary assistance.

### **5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' ROLES IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN A SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL IN THE EMALAHLENI DISTRICT?**

The participants were asked what their roles are and if they play an important role in the education of their children. Participants provided their opinions and shared their views of the roles they play.

#### **5.3.1 Parents' roles in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the parents in the current study responded that the role of the parents in their involvement is important as parents need to be supportive of their children and need to educate their children to be independent. The parent's role is to be there for your child at all times, to raise your child to be independent and to be positive and supportive in all activities. The parents in the current study referred to some of the roles they fulfil in the education of their children with ASD. There is no doubt that parental involvement plays a pivotal role in learner's academic achievement (Page, 2016). Parents play a big role in their children's development and success both in and out of school and although there are no manuals for raising happy, caring, confident and successful children, parents do their best with the information they have to help their children get ready to succeed in school (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein & Lloyd, 2013). Parents as well as the family as a whole, play the role of the direct leaders as well as supporters of the implementation of the education of their children (Ceka & Murati, 2016). Parents need to be made aware of their role in education by the relevant structures to encourage parental involvement in schools (Selolo 2018). According to Mafa and Makuba, (2013), some parents do not take an active role in their children's education because they are not aware of the impact their participation has on their children's education. The roles of parents in the education of children with ASD are provided in the SIAS policy and should be given to parents when they enrol their children in the school (DoE, 2014). According to Epstein, one of the roles parents can play in the education of their children is by volunteering to help out at the school. For example, parents can help by being involved in organising events at school; or helping out during classroom field trips; filling in as substitute teacher (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Lemmer, 2007).

### **5.3.2 Teachers' roles in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the teachers responded that the role of the teacher in the involvement of parents is fundamental as the teacher builds a foundation whether it is with regard to discipline, the children's development or constantly motivating children to give their best. According to the findings of this study, the teacher's role is to build a foundation, to enhance discipline, to shape a child and to motivate the child constantly. Learners experience different barriers and have different needs which mean that the teacher must meet this diverse need of the learners. Teachers must plan each child's intervention programme carefully. Learning content should also be differentiated to accommodate all the learners. The role of teachers in education is clearly outlined in the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (DoE, 2014) and should be given to teachers to teachers working with children with ASD so that they know what their roles are. One of the roles that teachers can play is by allowing parents to volunteer at the school. Parents can support the teachers with their children's school programme (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). Volunteers may help teachers in the library, computer room, or on the playground, with celebrations or any other events (Epstein et al., 2002).

## **5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON HOW PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD IN A SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL IN THE EMALAHLENI DISTRICT CAN BE ENHANCED?**

The participants were asked how they think parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced. The participants' responses are explained in the following section.

### **5.4.1 Parents' views on how parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced**

It is evident from the findings in the current study that parents have a need for in-depth training on how to assist their children with ASD in the educational context. Parents also expressed their need for support groups where they have the opportunity to meet other parents who also have children with ASD. Parental involvement in the education of children with ASD could be enhanced by incorporating parents' needs into school services



or connect parents to the relevant community resources (Zeman et al., 2011)

Workshops for parents could be organised, which may focus on the importance of parent involvement in the education of their children with ASD. The workshops are expected to boost the confidence of the parents. Parents need to be assisted by the school regarding information as well as training with regard to how to help their children as not all parents know how to become involved in their children's education. Parents can broaden their knowledge on how to be more involved in their children's education and to realise how important parental involvement is in their children's education. Training and workshops for parents may highlight the importance of parental involvement and help everyone involved to enhance the parents' involvement in their children's education.

This study may form the basis for future research that may be taking place. This research has revealed the need for parents to be actively involved in their children's schools as well as their strengths and weaknesses with regard to providing assistance. By conducting research on parental involvement in the education of children with ASD, the researcher may contribute to bridging the gap between evidence and practice as scant research has been conducted on ASD in South Africa. As mentioned in section 1.3, Epstein (1994) agrees that it is important for teachers to assist parents by arranging parenting workshops and helping families find the needed support.

#### **5.4.2 Teachers' views on how parental involvement in the education of children with ASD**

Most of the teachers responded that parental support strategies should include information sessions and parent meetings. Resources should also be established to ensure that parental involvement is enhanced. Parental involvement can be enhanced through workshops, talks, seminars and support groups that may help parents and teachers to receive the necessary information that is needed to become more involved in the education of children with ASD. By attending these seminars and workshops

teachers, as well as parents, should gain knowledge and insight into a world that is constantly changing, especially when working with children with ASD and other special needs. Schools should develop both a plan and programme for family and community involvement (Bartel, 2010). The use of effective strategies for encouraging parental involvement will enable the parents to be able to see the importance of being involved in their children's learning and to be able to see the benefits that may result afterwards (Ntekane, 2018). The nature of parental involvement changes as the learners get older and this also varies from family to family (Page, 2016). Parents who attend ASD training and information sessions are able to understand ASD better and provide support to their children (Huang, 2013). Teachers have to be sent on regular courses and workshops that are focussed specifically on learners with special needs. They need to be updated regularly on what is happening in the autistic world but also regarding other special needs. Teachers need to be qualified in the field of special needs education when they work at a special needs school. As mentioned in section 1.3, schools should coordinate resources and services for the families, the learners, the school and the community. This can include providing information for learners and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support and other programmes or services (Epstein, 1994; Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Michael et al., 2012).

## **5.5 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

The researcher evaluated the study critically to determine its strengths and limitations.

### **5.5.1 Strengths of the study**

- Using a phenomenological study enabled the researcher to collect data that were based on the participants' experiences and were, therefore, able to have a better understanding of the phenomenon.
- Using the interview process enabled the researcher to gain insight into teachers' and parents' views on parental involvement in the education of children with ASD.
- Limited research has been published about parental involvement in the education of children with ASD in South Africa. Therefore, the aim of the research was to contribute to baseline data for future research.

### **5.5.2 Limitations of the study**

- All the data used for the research were collected from one school in the Mpumalanga Province, which limits generalisability of the results to other locales.
- A limitation was the convenience sampling technique due to the small number of parents and teachers who provided consent to participate in the study. More interviews would have assured a more representative sample of the parents and teachers in the school.
- Another limitation of the research was the access to the participants. Despite the researcher's efforts and many letters of invitations to the parents and teachers, the researcher was unable to get more participants to take part in this study at the one autism and special needs school in the Mpumalanga Province. As a result, the researcher had to use fewer participants in the study on which to base the findings.

### **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

- The data obtained in this study can be used as a baseline for future research on the parental involvement in South Africa. Future research is needed in order to determine the barriers and benefits of parental involvement in the education of learners with ASD in South Africa.
- Future research on parental involvement should be conducted in more schools accommodating learners with ASD as this will enable a researcher to generalise the findings of the research and to make comparisons between different schools accommodating learners with ASD.
- Future research may also focus on determining which resources are needed to enhance parental involvement in schools accommodating learners with ASD.
- In South Africa, educational placement for learners with ASD is a pertinent topic in the light of an inclusive education policy recommending that all learners be included and educated in the least restrictive environment (DoE, 2001). Therefore, further research should be done to ensure that all learners with ASD have access to education.

## **5.7 GENERAL CONCLUSION**

The teachers and parents of learners diagnosed with ASD who participated in this study expressed themselves openly regarding their understanding of the term “parental involvement.” Importantly, the researcher aimed to gain insight into teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of their involvement in the education of children with ASD. The researcher has a better understanding of how teachers and parents define their involvement in children with ASD and parents’ attitudes towards their involvement. The finding of the study highlights the importance of parental involvement, benefits and barriers that are associated with parental involvement in the education of children with ASD. The researcher also reported on ways in which parental involvement in the education of children with ASD can be enhanced. All the research questions were answered, and the aims of the study were reached. The study provided evidence that there is a need to conduct research on the parental involvement of parents and teachers in the education of children with ASD across the country.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethical clearance certificate – Faculty of Education, University of South Africa

 UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE	
Date: 2017/10/18	Ref: <b>2017/10/18/45533229/23/MC</b>
Dear Ms Marais	Name: Ms HP Marais
<b>Decision:</b> Ethics Approval from 2017/10/18 to 2022/10/18	Student: 45533229
<hr/>	
<b>Researcher:</b>	
Name: Ms HP Marais	
Email: estle.bulls@gmail.com	
Telephone: +27 82 417 5731	
<b>Supervisor:</b>	
Name: Ms E Erasmus	
Email: vbiljs@unisa.ac.za	
Telephone: +27 12 481 2766	
<hr/>	
<b>Title of research:</b>	
<b>Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A phenomenological study</b>	
<hr/>	
<b>Qualification:</b> M Ed in Inclusive Education	
<hr/>	
Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2017/10/18 to 2022/10/18.	
<hr/>	
<i>The low/medium/high risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2017/10/18 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.</i>	
<hr/>	
The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:	
<hr/>	
	
University of South Africa Pretoria, Mankweng Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0203 South Africa Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150 www.unisa.ac.za	

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date 2022/10/18. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

*Notes:*

*The reference number 2017/10/18/45533229/23/MC should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



**Dr M Claassens**  
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**  
 mcdtc@netactive.co.za

  
**Prof V McKay**  
**EXECUTIVE DEAN**

Approved - decision template - updated 16 Feb 2017

University of South Africa  
 P.O. Box 382, Muckleneys Ridge, City of Tshwane  
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## Appendix B: Request for permission to conduct research at the school



### Request for permission to conduct research at your school

Title of the title of the research: Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A phenomenological study

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Principal

I, Estie Marais, am doing research under supervision of Ms Sumari Erasmus, a lecturer in the Department of Inclusive Education and Prof Mahlo, a professor in the Department of Inclusive Education towards a Master's in Education Degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A phenomenological study.

The aim of the study is to explore parental involvement in a school for learners with special educational needs, specifically Autism Spectrum Disorder. Only parents of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder and teachers working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be included in this in the study.

Your school has been selected because you were identified as a school that has learners diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The more parents and teachers included in the study the more reliable the results will be. I would therefore like to include the parents of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder and teachers working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the school.

The inclusion criteria for the participants are as follows:

- The parent must have a child that is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- The teachers must currently work at the school.

The study entails:

Parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be invited to attend a parents' information session where the researcher will explain the study and what the study



entails. Teachers working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be invited to attend a teacher information session where the researcher will also explain the study and what the study entails. Information will be given on the latest parental involvement in South Africa and the world. Every parent and teacher will receive an information sheet with all the necessary information regarding the research study. Every parent and teacher will be given an informed consent form to complete. A date and time will be scheduled for an interview with the parents and teachers who are willing to participate in the study. Apart from the interviews, the research will also conduct data analysis of the following documents: homework books of the learners, workbooks of the learners, attendance register of parents attending parent evenings and other school activities, minutes of the parent evening meetings, school policies on parental involvement, parental involvement programs currently implemented in the schools. By analysing the documents the researcher will be able to obtain a better understanding of how involved parents are in the education of their child.

The benefits of this study:

This study may benefit school managers who want to promote parental involvement in the education of children and parents may benefit as they will have a better understanding of the importance of their involvement in the education of their children.

Risks of this study:

The parents and teachers will not be exposed to any risks during the study. The researcher will not ask any uncomfortable questions.

Compensation:

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Access to the research:

Feedback procedure will entail a parent and teacher information session where the results and findings will be shared with the participants. Upon completion of the research study an electronic and hard copy of the research report will be submitted to the University of South Africa and the school's principal.



I am happy to share the results from this study with you. If you are interested to receive a free copy of the results, please inform me. Should you require any further information please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Ms Estie Marais

Student

0824175731

estie.bulls@gmail.com



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Ms Sumari Erasmus

Supervisor

012 481 2766

vbiljs@unisa.ac.za



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Prof FD Mahlo

Co-supervisor

012 481 2756

[mahlofd@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mahlofd@unisa.ac.za)

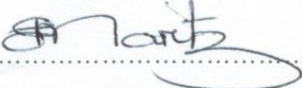


## Appendix C: Written permission to conduct the research obtained from the principal

Reply form: consent from principal to participate in the study

I hereby give consent to participate in the study titled: "Teacher and parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder – a phenomenological study". The researcher, Ms Estie Marais, has informed me about the nature, process, risks, discomforts and benefits of the study. I am aware that the results of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report. I have had the time to ask questions and have no more objections to participate in the study. I hereby also give/do not give consent that the data may be used for future research.

Name: Elaise Maritz

Signature: 

Date: 2018/01/19

## Appendix D: Participant information and consent letter (parents)



### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder:  
A phenomenological study

#### DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

I, Estie Marais, am doing research under supervision of Ms Sumari Erasmus, a lecturer in the Department of Inclusive Education and Prof Mahlo, a professor in the Department of Inclusive Education towards a Master's in Education Degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A phenomenological study.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the research is to determine the parental involvement in a school for learners with special educational needs, specifically Autism Spectrum Disorder. Only parents of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder and teachers working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be included in this in the study.

Similar research conducted worldwide, have helped countries understand children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families better and to plan and implement educational support and appropriate services to learners.

#### WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you adhere to the requirement of the study. The more parents and teachers included in the study the more reliable the results will be. I would therefore like to include the parents of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder and teachers working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the school.

The inclusion criteria for the participants are as follows:

1. The parent must have a child that is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
2. The teachers must currently work at the school.



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### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

The study involves semi-structured interviews. Questions for the interviews conducted with the parents will consist of demographic characteristics, parent responsibilities, benefits of involvement, parents understanding of parent involvement, and the attitudes of parents. Questions for the interviews conducted with the teachers will consist of teachers' understanding of parental involvement, teachers' role in the child's education, benefits of teacher's involvement and challenges that the parents face regarding their involvement. These questions are formulated to get an insight into the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding the involvement of parents in their child's education and treatment intervention. Interviews will be approximately 20 minutes. Apart from the interviews, the research will also conduct data analysis of the following documents: homework books of the learners, workbooks of the learners, attendance register of parents attending parent evenings and other school activities, minutes of the parent evening meetings, school policies on parental involvement, parental involvement programs currently implemented in the schools. By analysing the documents the researcher will be able to obtain a better understanding of how involved parents are in the education of their child.

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent (adult)/ assent (participant younger than 18 years old) form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you participated in the interview, it will not be possible to withdraw from the study.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

This study may benefit school managers who want to promote parental involvement in the education of children and parents may benefit as they will have a better understanding of the importance of their involvement in the education of their children.

### **ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

There are no negative consequences for you to participate in the study. You will not be exposed to any risks during the study. The researcher will not ask any uncomfortable questions.



**WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

All information obtained from the interviews and observations will be reported on anonymously as there will be no names on the interview transcripts or the observation notes. I intend to write a dissertation about the information obtained from the interviews and observations. No school information will be given.

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of one year after the submission of the report in a locked filing cabinet for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on an external hard drive and on a compact disk in a safe. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software program.

**WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

**HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

Feedback procedure will entail a parent information session where the results and findings will be shared with you.



Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Ms Estie Marais on 082 417 5731 or email [estie.bulls@gmail.com](mailto:estie.bulls@gmail.com).

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Ms Estie Marais  
Student  
0824175731  
[estie.bulls@gmail.com](mailto:estie.bulls@gmail.com)



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Ms Sumari Erasmus  
Supervisor  
012 481 2766  
[vbilis@unisa.ac.za](mailto:vbilis@unisa.ac.za)



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Prof FD Mahlo  
Co-supervisor  
012 481 2756  
[mahlofd@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mahlofd@unisa.ac.za)



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### CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study in education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Name: (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix E: Participant information and consent letter (teachers)



### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder:  
A phenomenological study

#### DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

I, Estie Marais, am doing research under supervision of Ms Sumari Erasmus, a lecturer in the Department of Inclusive Education and Prof Mahlo, a professor in the Department of Inclusive Education towards a Master's in Education Degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A phenomenological study.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the research is to determine the parental involvement in a school for learners with special educational needs, specifically Autism Spectrum Disorder. Only parents of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder and teachers working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be included in this in the study.

Similar research conducted worldwide, have helped countries understand children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families better and to plan and implement educational support and appropriate services to learners.

#### WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you adhere to the requirement of the study. The more parents and teachers included in the study the more reliable the results will be. I would therefore like to include the parents of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder and teachers working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the school.

The inclusion criteria for the participants are as follows:

1. The parent must have a child that is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
2. The teachers must currently work at the school.



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### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

The study involves semi-structured interviews. Questions for the interviews conducted with the parents will consist of demographic characteristics, parent responsibilities, benefits of involvement, parents understanding of parent involvement, and the attitudes of parents. Questions for the interviews conducted with the teachers will consist of teachers' understanding of parental involvement, teachers' role in the child's education, benefits of teacher's involvement and challenges that the parents face regarding their involvement. These questions are formulated to get an insight into the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding the involvement of parents in their child's education and treatment intervention. Interviews will be approximately 20 minutes. Apart from the interviews, the research will also conduct data analysis of the following documents: homework books of the learners, workbooks of the learners, attendance register of parents attending parent evenings and other school activities, minutes of the parent evening meetings, school policies on parental involvement, parental involvement programs currently implemented in the schools. By analysing the documents the researcher will be able to obtain a better understanding of how involved parents are in the education of their child.

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent (adult)/ assent (participant younger than 18 years old) form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you participated in the interview, it will not be possible to withdraw from the study.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

This study may benefit school managers who want to promote parental involvement in the education of children and parents may benefit as they will have a better understanding of the importance of their involvement in the education of their children.

### **ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

There are no negative consequences for you to participate in the study. You will not be exposed to any risks during the study. The researcher will not ask any uncomfortable questions.



**WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

All information obtained from the interviews and observations will be reported on anonymously as there will be no names on the interview transcripts or the observation notes. I intend to write a dissertation about the information obtained from the interviews and observations. No school information will be given.

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of one year after the submission of the report in a locked filing cabinet for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on an external hard drive and on a compact disk in a safe. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software program.

**WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

**HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

Feedback procedure will entail a parent information session where the results and findings will be shared with you.





Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Ms Estie Marais on 082 417 5731 or email [estie.bulls@gmail.com](mailto:estie.bulls@gmail.com).

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Ms Estie Marais  
Student  
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[estie.bulls@gmail.com](mailto:estie.bulls@gmail.com)



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Ms Sumari Erasmus  
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Prof FD Mahlo  
Co-supervisor  
012 481 2756  
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## CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study in education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Name: (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix F: Document analysis

### DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

- ☐ Attendance register of parents' evenings
- ☐ Homework books of the learners
- ☐ Learners' workbooks
- ☐ Parental involvement policies
- ☐ Minutes of the parents' meetings
- ☐ Parental involvement program

Describe it as if you were explaining to someone who can't see it.

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#### Observe parts of the document

Who wrote the document? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the date of the document? \_\_\_\_\_

Where is it from? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Making sense of the document**

What is the document about?

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List important pieces of information presented in this document.

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Why was the document written?

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What evidence in the document helps to determine why it was written? Provide a quote from the text.

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## Appendix G: Interview questions for parents

### ***Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder***

Thank you for participating in the research. I would like to ask you some questions regarding your child and your family. Please remember that answers will be kept confidential and will only be reported as a group, not as individual families. This interview should be conducted with the primary caregiver/parent/guardian.

#### **Section A: Information about your child**

1. Date the interview was held:

2. What is your relationship to your child? (Mother, father, family caregiver, non-family caregiver, etc)

3. Child's date of birth:

4. What is the gender of your child?

5. How old is your child now (age in years)?

	Years
--	-------

6. According to the Employment Equity Act, to which population group does your child belong to? (Black, coloured, White, Asian, Indian, other)

7. What is the primary language that your child is exposed to at home?

#### **Section B: Information about the family**

8.a) Does your child have any other siblings with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

8.b) If yes, please specify the age and gender.

9. Who is the primary \*caregiver of your child?

\*Caregiver: An individual, such as a family member or guardian, who takes care of a child with an impairment and helps him/her with activities of daily living.

10. According to the Employment Equity Act, to which population group do you as parent/primary caregiver belong to?  
(Black, Coloured, White, Asian, Indian, other)

11. What is the highest qualification of the father?

12. What is the marital status of the mother?

13. What is the highest qualification of the mother?

14. What is the highest qualification of the primary caregiver?

15. Who is the breadwinner of the family?

16. How many people are living in your household?

17. Describe what is like being a parent of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

18. What do you understand by the term 'parent involvement'?

19. What do you think is your role as a parent in your child's education?

20. Do you think there are benefits of being involved as a parent in your child's education?

21. Who should initiate parent involvement: the school or the parents?

22. Describe your responsibilities as a parent of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

23. As a parent of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder what aspects of parenting would you like help in?

24. Do you think that the school should assists parents on the issue of parenting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, if yes in what way?

25. How are you informed about what is happening at your child's school?

--

26.a) Have you attended any parent meetings at school this year?

Yes	
No	

26.b) How many per year?

--

26.c) What are your views/comments on the parent meetings?

--

27. Are you involved in any other activities at your child's school? Please explain.

--

28. In your opinion do you think the school arranges enough opportunities for parents to become involved in the schooling of their children?

--

29. In what areas would you like the school to support you as a parent?

--

30. What factors influences your involvement as a parent in your child's education?

--

31. If you child has homework to do in the afternoons, who helps him/her with the homework?

--

32. Has the school offered you any support on how you can help your child with homework? Please explain.

33. Can you suggest any strategies/training for the school to support you as a parent?

## Appendix H: Interview questions for teachers

### *Parental involvement in the education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

Thank you for participating in the research. I would like to ask you some questions regarding parental involvement in your school. Please remember that answers will be kept confidential. This interview will be conducted with the teacher.

#### Section A: Information about the teacher

1. Date the interview was held:

2. According to the Employment Equity Act, to which population group do you as parent/primary caregiver belong to? (Black, Indian, White, Asian, Coloured, other)

3. What is your highest qualification?

4. What do you understand by the term 'parent involvement'?

5. What do you do to promote high levels of parent involvement in their children's education?

6. What do you think is your role as a teacher in the education of children in your school?

7. Do you think there are benefits of teachers being involved in children's education?

8. Who should initiate parent involvement: the school or the parents?

9. What do parents do that tell you they are involved in their children's education?

10. Does the school offer any guidance or support in terms of parenting a child with autism spectrum disorder?

11. Do you think that the school should assist parents on the issue of parenting children with autism spectrum disorder, if yes in what way?

12. How are parents informed about what is happening at their child's school?

13.a) Are parents attending parent meeting at school?

13.b) In your class, how many parents have attended the parent meetings this year?

14.c) What are your views/comments on the parent meetings?

14. Are parents involved in any other activities at your school? Please explain.

15. In your opinion, do you think the school arranges enough opportunities for parents to become involved in the schooling of their children?

16. What resources, supports, expertise and other factors would make the biggest difference in increasing parent involvement?

17. What challenges do parents face as they try to become involved in their children's education?



## Appendix I: Language Editors' Certification

P.O.Box 428  
BRONKHORSTSPRUIT  
1020  
7 January 2020

To whom it may concern

I hereby certify that I have edited the dissertation entitled "Parental involvement in the education of children with autism spectrum disorder: a phenomenological study" by Hester Petronella Marais (student number 4553-322-9).

Yours faithfully



Carol Jansen

Language practitioner  
Cell no 082 9200312  
carolsusan07@gmail.com

MA (General Linguistics) (Stellenbosch University)  
BEd (Unisa)  
BBibl (Hons) (Unisa)